

Defences of Unitarianism for the Year 1786,

CONTAINING

LETTERS

TO

DR. HORNE, DEAN OF CANTERBURY;

TO THE

YOUNG MEN, WHO ARE IN A COURSE OF EDUCATION  
FOR THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, AT THE  
UNIVERSITIES OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE;

TO THE

REV. DR. PRICE;

AND TO THE

REV. MR. PARKHURST;

On the Subject of the PERSON of CHRIST.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. ADREL. MED.  
PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

Tandem Ductores, audita cæde suorum,  
Conveniunt ———

VIRGIL.

BIRMINGHAM,  
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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

THE readers of this controversy concerning *the person of Christ*, will, I doubt not, congratulate themselves on seeing it in new hands, and in those of persons who promise to conduct it both with better temper, and with more knowledge of the subject, than it was done by Dr. Horsley.

According to appearance, we must now despair of hearing any thing more from the Archdeacon of St. Albans. But this is not to be regretted, while such a man as the Dean of Canterbury has announced his entrance into the same field of combat, while Mr. Howes (though his motions are more tardy than he gave us reason to expect they would be) remains in it; while Mr. White, the learned professor of Arabic at Oxford, discovers so much laudable zeal in the cause of

A 2                      orthodoxy,

orthodoxy; and while others, of no less erudition\*, I am informed, are preparing to join the corps, now that they see the danger to be pressing.

Indeed, in a case of so great emergency, when so much may be lost, viz. the uninterrupted possession of ages, and so much *honour* (to say nothing of *emolument*) is to be acquired by preserving it, who that has any confidence in his prowess would not crowd to the standard, erected by the Dean of Canterbury, who so loudly calls upon all the friends of orthodoxy, to *contend earnestly for THEIR faith?* Without any disparagement to this truly learned and worthy dignitary, I hope his call will soon be answered by numbers, still higher in rank, and in fame, than even himself.

To be perfectly serious; I must acknowledge that it gives me more pleasure than I

\* In this I alluded more particularly to Mr. Parkhurst, whose work having appeared since this Preface was written, I have had an opportunity of replying to it at the close of the present publication.

can express, to see such a prospect of this very important question, concerning *the person of Christ*, being thoroughly discussed, and perhaps finally terminated; so that the generality of those who give attention to these subjects, may have reason to think, that every consideration on which their judgment ought to be formed, will be fairly before them; that every weak or doubtful argument will appear to be so, and that nothing will remain in the scale, but what has unquestionable weight.

The learned and inquisitive will then no longer *halt between two opinions*. If Christ be truly *God*, they will receive and honour him as such; but if he be only *a man* sent by God; they will honour him as the ambassador of God, not so much regarding himself, as *him that sent him*. And whatever shall be the settled opinion of the *learned*, it will, in due time, become that of the unlearned, and of the Christian world in general. To be the instruments in the hands of Divine Providence in bringing about so great



an event, is so honourable, that I hope it cannot fail to excite the laudable ambition of many. Such an opportunity of distinguishing themselves, and of serving the cause of truth, may not soon occur again.

I feel more particular satisfaction in that part of this generous contest which relates to Dr. Price; partly because it is the first opportunity that has been afforded me of discussing in this manner the subject of *Arianism*; and also because it enables me to give another example of the manner in which I most wish to conduct a controversy; to shew that friends to each other may, at the same time, be greater friends to *truth*, and that they can even *earnestly contend* for this, without the least hazard of a breach in their friendship.

It is too common for persons engaged in controversy to lose sight of *truth*, and to contend for *victory* only. And when that is the object, those passions which enter into other contests, which have the same object,  
enter



enter into this ; and the effect is both unpleasant in itself, and in a variety of respects, unfavourable to the cause of truth. But in our former discussion of the doctrines of *materialism*, and *necessity*, nothing of this kind appeared on either side, and the door shall be as religiously shut against it in this.

That discussion was brought to its proper termination ; each of us having advanced every thing that we thought proper in support of our respective opinions, and then we made a joint publication of the whole. In this case, my friend has declared his resolution not to engage in any controversy ; and, as the time is approaching, when I may think proper to make a similar resolution, I shall not urge him on the subject. But I write with his full consent ; and we both of us earnestly wish that some other common friend, at least some other learned Arian, who, like him, shall be actuated by a pure love of truth, may take his place. Whoever he be, I will engage that he shall have no reason to complain of *me*. He

shall have nothing to fear but fair dispassionate *argument*; and if he be worthy to succeed Dr. Price, it will be a matter of indifference to him, whether the friendly contest end in his favour, or in mine.

My highly valued friend will himself not fail to give due attention to what we write; and if he should see reason to change his opinion with respect to any particular article in the discussion, I have no doubt but that he will generously avow it in the future editions of his *Sermons*. Should he be induced to abandon Arianism altogether (O that this were not too much to be expected of *man*) I have as little doubt, that he would take an early opportunity of acknowledging it, and with that ingenuous frankness which marks his character. In this case, we should perhaps also have from his hand, a striking view of the Socinian, or as he himself would then call it, the only proper *unitarian* doctrine. There is an energy in what he delivers, as coming directly from the heart, which few writers have attained.

It

It is not mere mental ability that can enable a man to write like him. It requires perfect integrity, as well as a sound understanding. Better were it to be in any error with such a heart, than have the best head, and hold all truth, without it.

Writing to the Dean of Canterbury, who is at the head of a college in Oxford, I was insensibly lead to address myself to *the young men who are in a course of education for the christian ministry at the two universities*. For this, I hope, to obtain their pardon, if not their thanks. What I have done proceeds from an earnest desire to awaken their attention to a subject that most nearly concerns them, and through them *the public*, whom they are destined to serve.

To have gone on, as many have done, from generation to generation, subscribing what they have not considered, and then maintaining it because they have subscribed it, and because they would be distressed if they should



should abandon at once the fruits of their subscription, can only have arisen from a want of attention to so serious a subject. The most important and the plainest of all truths may not be perceived, till it be distinctly pointed out. But when attention is excited, the ingenuous youth, who would otherwise have gone heedlessly on, as thousands have done before him, will start at the apprehension of a wrong step in his conduct, as at the sight of a precipice before him; and then, whatever be the inconvenience of retreating, he will see that it must be better than to proceed.

May the God *of truth* open all our minds, and *lead us into all truth*; and especially may he give us the courage to acknowledge it, when it is discovered. The consequences of this may, in certain circumstances, be painful, but they are temporary; whereas the consequence of persisting in error, and of living in the perpetual violation of integrity, while it fills the ingenuous mind  
with



with anguish here, must be followed by much greater anguish hereafter. Such conduct requires only to be fairly exhibited. It must at once be seen to be unworthy of a man, and much more so of a christian, and a christian minister.

---

As I wish not to trouble my readers with more publications in this controversy than may be necessary; and I expect, at least hope, to have many more antagonists than have yet appeared, I here inform them, that I shall not make an immediate reply to every particular publication, but shall generally wait a proper time, in order to take into consideration what may be advanced by several of them, as I have done on this occasion.

It is my earnest wish that this important controversy with trinitarians, and especially with Arians, may come to a proper termination.

tion. Nothing, as I have more than once declared, shall be wanting on my part to bring it to this desirable issue; and I pledge myself to the public, not to pass without notice any objection to which I may be unable to make a satisfactory reply. If it relate to a subject of much consequence, I shall not only make a frank acknowledgment of my mistake, but take the most early opportunity of doing it; but if it only affect an article of small consequence, I may content myself with correcting my works, if they should ever come to another edition. If any person think me superior to my adversaries with respect to force of *argument* (which can only arise from the goodness of the cause which I have espoused) I am determined to give them proofs of a still greater superiority with respect to *ingenuousness*.

Let it be understood, however, that this engagement relates only to the *history* that I have given of the rise and progress of the trinitarian doctrine, of Arianism, and of unitarianism, in the early ages, which is a  
proper

proper field for the *learned in ecclesiastical history*, and not to that branch of the controversy which has been so long canvassed, that very little that is *new* can be expected to be advanced on any side, I mean the *doctrine of the scriptures* on the subject, any farther than it may be introduced incidentally, and in connexion with the historical discussion.

But this historical discussion, when the nature of it is well considered, cannot, as I have frequently observed, but be thought to decide concerning the whole controversy. For, if it be true, as I have endeavoured to prove by copious historical evidence, not only that proper unitarians were in communion with the catholic church, and were not classed with *heretics*; but that the great mass of unlearned christians continued to be simply unitarians till the second and third century, it will hardly be doubted but that their instructors, viz. the apostles, and first disciples of Christ, were unitarians also, and therefore



therefore that no other interpretation of the scriptures than that of the *unitarians*, as opposed to that of the *trinitarians*, or *Arians*, can be the true one.

N. B. I am just informed, that it was not Mr. Prettyman, but Dr. Prettyman himself, the present bishop of Lincoln, who preached the *Sermon*, mentioned page 6. I should be sorry to fix a charge of illiberality on any wrong person ; and I shall now with more confidence expect, from the high rank of his Lordship, that he will do me the justice I require.

\* \* A year is nearly elapsed since this Preface was written, but nothing has yet come from the Bishop on the subject.

BIRMINGHAM,  
FEB. 1, 1788.

T H E



T H E  
C O N T E N T S.

LETTERS to the Dean of Canterbury.

- Letter I. *Introduction; and of the Charge of Ignorance or Insincerity in the Defenders of the Doctrine of the Trinity* - - - - - Page 1
- Letter II. *Of the Argument from Antiquity, and of Dr. Horsley's Services with Respect to it* - 7
- Letter III. *Of the Interference of Civil Power in Matters of Religion* - - - - - 18
- Letter IV. *Of some particular Arguments for the Doctrine of the Trinity* - - - - - 25
- Letter V. *Miscellaneous Articles, and Conclusion* 36

LETTERS

LETTERS to the Young Men, who are  
in a Course of Education for the chris-  
tian Ministry, at the Universities of Ox-  
ford and Cambridge - - - - - 41

Letter I. *Of Subscription to Articles of Faith* - 43

Letter II. *Of the Study of the Doctrine of the Tri-  
nity* - - - - - 50

Letter III. *Of the Difficulties attending an open Ac-  
knowledgment of Truth* - - - - - 56

Letter IV. *Animadversions on Dr. Purkis's Ser-  
mon* - - - - - 63

1. *Of the Influence of Philosophy on Religion* - 64

2. *Of Mysteries in Religion* - - - - - 67

3. *Of Toleration* - - - - - 68

4. *Of perverting the Language of the Scriptures* 70

5. *Of Materialism and the Doctrine of Philoso-  
phical Necessity* - - - - - 71

Letter V. *Of Mr. Jones's catholic Doctrine of the  
Trinity* - - - - - 74

LETTERS

# C O N T E N T S.

xvi

## L E T T E R S

TO THE

REV. DR. P R I C E.

Letter I. <i>Introductory</i>	- - -	89
Letter II. <i>Of the Nature and antecedent Probability of the Arian Hypothesis, with the Causes of Attachment to it</i>	- -	94
Letter III. <i>Of the Creation of Matter by the Father, and the Formation of it by the Son, and other Considerations relating to the Idea of a finite and imperfect Creator.</i>	- -	104
Letter IV. <i>Considerations relating to the Origin and History of the Arian Doctrine. Of Christ not being the Object of Prayer, and of the Claim of Arians to the Appellation of Unitarians</i>		110
Letter V. <i>Of the proof from the Scriptures of the Creation of the World by Christ</i>	-	117
Letter VI. <i>Of the Argument for the pre-existent Dignity of Christ from his working Miracles</i>		124
Letter VII. <i>Of the Argument for the pre-existent Dignity of Christ, from his being supposed to have raised himself from the Dead, and from his voluntarily dismissing his Spirit when he died</i>		128

b

Letter



Letter VIII. *Of the Argument for the pre-existent  
Dignity of Christ, from particular Passages of  
Scripture supposed to assert, or to imply it* 135

Letter IX. *Of the Argument for the superior Na-  
ture of Christ from his raising the Dead, and  
judging the World* - - 140

Letter X. *Of the Hypothesis which makes Christ  
to be a mere Man, naturally as fallible, and as  
peccable, as other Men* - - 148

Letter XI. *Of the Design of Christ's Mission* 156

Letter XII. *The Conclusion* - 163

A LETTER to the Rev. Mr. PARK-  
HURST - - - 175



# L E T T E R S

T O

D R. H O R N E,

DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

Ω φίλοι, ε γαρ πω τι κακων αδαημονες εσμεν.  
Ου μεν δη τοδε μειζον επι κακου, η ολι ΚΥΚΛΩΨ  
Ειλει ενι σπηι γλαφυρω, κρατερηφι βιηφι,  
Αλλα κ' ενθεν εμνη αρετη, βελη τε, νοω τε,  
Εκφυγομεν.

HOMERI ODYS.

Si pereo, manibus hominum periisse juvabit.

VIRGIL.

LETTER

TO

THE

BOARD OF

MANAGEMENT

OF THE

UNIVERSITY

OF CALIFORNIA

AT

BERKELEY

CALIFORNIA

1900

LETTERS  
TO THE  
DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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LETTER I.

*Introduction, and of the Charge of Ignorance or Insincerity in the Defenders of the Doctrine of the Trinity.*

REV. SIR,

AFTER being engaged in a controversy relating to the doctrine of the *Trinity*, with some very insolent, and, as I think I have shewn, insufficient antagonists, I rejoice, that in *you* I have met with one who is truly candid, learned, and in every view respectable. You, Sir, are as sensible as myself of the importance of this discussion, and have the same wish to conduct it in the most proper, that is, in the most amicable manner, as lovers of truth, and not contenders for victory. “We must not,” you say, p. 9, “knowingly engage in a bad cause, nor persevere, if, in the process, we discover our cause to be a bad one. No mis-

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“chief,”



"chief," p. 15, "will arise from the discussion. Truth always has been, and always will be, a gainer by it."

With respect to the subject of this controversy, you very justly say, p. 2, "If the doctrine of the trinity be not true, the christian church has been guilty of *idolatry*;" and, though I do not think it is with equal justice that you add, "from the very days of the apostles," it has certainly been the case from a very early period. Against an accusation of this magnitude, you, who hold the doctrine, certainly do well to defend yourselves, and to exert all your powers to repel the attack that is made upon you.

You agree with me in having no dislike to controversy in general, saying, p. 15, "it is a whole-some exercise for us. It excites attention, and prevents indifference, the enemy of all others the most to be dreaded." In this, however, you differ very widely from Mr. Howes; who, though he very voluntarily engages in this discussion, is of opinion, that no good ever arose from controversy.

As you and I, Sir, agree in so many particulars, I flatter myself that, in due time, we shall be able to bring this important controversy to a proper termination, so that whatever may be the case with respect to ourselves and others, engaged in the discussion (for whose prejudices allowance will easily

be made) attentive readers will be able to perceive on which side the truth lies.

Before I proceed any farther, I wish to set you right with respect to a charge against me, that I am confident is ill-founded, viz. that I consider all the defenders of the doctrine of the trinity as either ignorant or insincere, p. 30. I really cannot imagine on what it is that this supposition is founded; since, in a variety of passages in my writings, I have expressed the greatest respect for some of those who have defended the doctrines of the church of Rome, as well as those of the church of England; and I have no doubt of their being equal to any unitarians, with respect to ability, learning, or integrity.

This charge, I suppose, you have adopted from Dr. Horsley, who advanced it in his *Letters to me*, p. 172. But you should not have repeated it without having read, and noticed, my reply to him on that subject, in my *Second Set of Letters to him*; in which, among other things, I say, p. 213, “ I do not pretend to recollect all that I have written; but I have such a consciousness of never having meant, or intended to say, what Dr. Horsley here charges me with, that I will venture to assert that he cannot have any more authority for *this*, than for the privileges granted to the Jewish christians of Jerusalem on their abandoning the ceremonies of their old religion.

“ I shall therefore consider this charge of Dr.  
 “ Horsley as a mere *calumny*, till he shall produce  
 “ some evidence for it. And if, in any of my  
 “ writings, he *can* find sufficient authority for his  
 “ accusation, I here retract what I advanced, and  
 “ ask pardon for it.”

As Dr. Horsley did publish a Reply to my *Letters*, without producing any proof of his charge, I am at liberty to consider it not only as a *calumny*, but as an *acknowledged one*, with the aggravation of his not having the grace to ask pardon for it; which certainly a regard to truth, and to the public, called for. Since you, Sir, choose to take up the matter where he left it, I am under a necessity of calling upon *you*, to do what he ought to have done, or to acknowledge your inability to do it, and consequently the injustice of your accusation. I have the same right to call upon Dr. Parr, who has likewise recorded this accusation in the notes to his *Sermon on Education*.

It is true, that I do not think quite so highly of Dr. Horsley's literature as you do; but among other defenders of the doctrine of the trinity, I am far from denying *him* a competent share of it: though he has, upon all occasions, expressed the greatest contempt for mine; besides charging me repeatedly with the most *fraudulent practices* in the conduct of this controversy. I wish his ingenuoussness had been equal to his ability, or his learning.

As



As to *your* learning, Sir, no person who has seen your *Commentary on the Psalms*, can call it in question. And that you are a real believer in the doctrine of the trinity, as laid down in the Athanasian creed, it is impossible to entertain a doubt, after your very solemn declaration to that purpose; when you say, p. 3, "I declare before God, in the sincerity  
" of my soul, upon the best judgment I can form,  
" I am verily persuaded it is the doctrine of the  
" scripture, and of the primitive church."

I am far from being offended at the compliment you pay Dr. Horsley, p. 22, as "evidently  
" an over-match for me, in point of literature;" and do not wonder that you should think, p. 15, that "the thanks of the Church of England are  
" due to him for his seasonable, learned, and judicious writings in her defence;" and therefore, that you should urge him, "to occupy the department he is so thoroughly qualified to fill, and  
" to go on, by frustrating the attempts of your  
" adversaries, to deprive you of the argument from  
" tradition." I am only concerned that, in this, you seem to give up that important province to him; when, in my opinion, it would be much better occupied by yourself.

I do not know, however, how it is, but after the great exertions of this boastful champion of yours (whom all your encomiums and encouragement will not, I fear, be able to bring into the field

again) your church seems more solicitous than ever to procure more help, and from other quarters. Your own *Sermon*, the object of which is to exhort your friends to *contend earnestly for the faith*, is a proof of this; and from many other publications, as well as the language that, as I am informed, is frequently held from many pulpits in different parts of the kingdom\*; it should seem that, notwithstanding all that had been done by Dr. Horsley, the faith of the church, and consequently the church itself, is still *in danger*. Is all this “to *slay the slain*?” The least that can be inferred from your sermon is, that the controversy is hardly well begun, and by no means that it is ended; and from your engaging in it, I flatter myself that it will be conducted in a manner infinitely more pleasing, both to myself and the public, as well as more satisfactory with respect to the object of it, than it is probable that it would have been, if it had continued in the hands of Dr. Horsley.

I am, with real esteem,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

J. P R I E S T L E Y.

\* I have heard that Mr. Prettyman, brother to Dr. Prettyman, secretary to Mr. Pitt, and now bishop of Lincoln, preached a very virulent sermon, in which my name was mentioned, before the Corporation of Norwich. I hope he is so much a man of honour, as to publish the sermon, and thereby give me an opportunity of knowing, *from himself*, what he really *did* say of me, that, if it appear to me to be necessary, I may vindicate myself.

L E T.

## L E T T E R II.

*Of the Argument from Antiquity, and of Dr. Horsley's  
Services with Respect to it.*

REV. SIR,

IT is evident, from your exhortations to Dr. Horsley, and the whole tenor of your discourse, that, notwithstanding the stress you very justly lay upon the doctrine of the *scriptures*, you do not undervalue the opinion of the *primitive church*. You say, p. 31, "If the doctrine of our Lord's  
"divinity be not the doctrine of the scriptures,  
"and of the primitive church" (as if these must have been the same) "it matters not *how, when,*  
"or *by whom*, it was afterwards introduced. It  
"should not have been received, and ought not  
"to be retained."

If, therefore, it can be proved by independent evidence, that the great body of primitive christians were unitarians, *one* of the strong holds of your faith is removed, and the other must be in great danger. For you could hardly have expressed yourself in the manner you have done, in the above quotation, if you had not thought some regard due to the sense in which the primi-



rive christians understood those books of scripture, which were written more immediately for their use, and in a language with which they were perfectly acquainted; regard enough to render us doubtful of the different interpretations which may be given at so great a distance of time as the present, and under the influence of such a mass of prejudices as may be supposed to have been contracted in the course of seventeen hundred years.

It cannot be doubted, but that the primitive christians really thought that their opinions, whatever they were, were contained in the scriptures, as these were the standard to which they constantly appealed. When you say, therefore, of what I have written, as you choose to express it, p. 31, “ in four large volumes, concerning the Jews, “ and the Gnostics, and the Ebionites, and the “ Nazarenes; concerning Plato, and Philo, and “ Justin Martyr, and Tertullian; concerning “ philosophers, fathers, and heretics, many and “ diverse, but all unitarians\*; concerning the “ supposed caution of the apostles, and the meta-

\* There is rather too much of rhetoric in this passage to be strictly true. I am far from supposing that Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and many others of the Fathers, were unitarians. I have shewn that they were trinitarians, but not such as the Dean of Canterbury would call so now, as they did not believe the perfect equality of all the three persons, but uniformly held the inferiority of the Son to the Father; which Dr. Horsley must also do, as he maintains, that the Father is the *fountain of deity*, and has some unknown pre-eminence over the Son.

“ physical and injudicious arguments and dis-  
“ quisions of writers, whether ancient or mo-  
“ dern, upon any part of the subject; that all  
“ this, with the goodly edifice raised on such a  
“ foundation, will fall directly to pieces, vanish  
“ into air; and, like the baseless fabric of a vi-  
“ sion, leave not a wreck behind;” your con-  
clusion is rather too hasty.

If, Sir, what I have advanced in those four volumes be just: if, from the various evidence that I have produced, it be indisputable, as I think it is, that the primitive christian church was unitarian; if all the explanations and defences of the doctrine of the trinity, by those who first broached it, and by those who have since maintained it, be absurd, and no better explanations or defences can be produced, the doctrine itself cannot be true; and no criticism upon any texts of scripture, if they can possibly bear an unitarian interpretation, can prove it to be so.

As you strongly recommend the study of ecclesiastical history, and that of the Fathers, I presume that, though you wish Dr. Horsley to occupy this department in the present discussion, you have not neglected to give due attention to it yourself. Indeed, your deciding so peremptorily as you do, on Dr. Horsley's superiority to me in that respect, shews that you think yourself qualified to judge between us. Permit me then to request, that you would state a little more particularly,

particularly, what the services of Dr. Horsley in this province, which you commend so much, have really been. For I cannot suppose that you would have given so general and decided a judgment on the whole of the argument, without having examined all the particulars, of which that whole consists.

As a lover of truth, then, and a candid scholar, please, whenever you publish your *large work*, to answer the following questions *seriatim*.

1. Has Dr. Horsley proved, that those who are called *Ebionites*, or *Nazarenes*, had no existence in the age of the apostles, and that the latter had their name from Nazareth, on their retiring to that place after the destruction of Jerusalem by Adrian? Has he even proved, that any of them were ever settled there at all?

2. Has he proved, as he undertook to do, that the Nazarenes, or Jerom's *Hebrews believing in Christ*, were orthodox with respect to the doctrine of the trinity\*?

3. Has he, after eighteen months re-consideration of the subject, and correcting his former

\* Since I wrote my reply to *Dr. Horsley's Remarks*, I observe that Dr. Lardner understood the passage in Jerom exactly as I did, taking it for granted, that by *Nazarenes* he meant the same people whom he called *Hebrews believing in Christ*. See his *Testimonies*, vol. i. p. 19.

opinion,



opinion, proved (Remarks, p. 60) that there were, in reality, *five* sects of Jewish christians, though Origen and Eusebius expressly make them to be no more than *two*, some of them admitting, and others denying, the miraculous conception; but all of them disbelieving the divinity of Christ, and adhering to the law of Moses? If this is to be received as authentic history, let us have, at least, the authority of the Dean of Canterbury for it, as well as that of the Archdeacon of St. Albans.

4. Has he proved that Origen, who expressly asserts that no Jewish christians believed the divinity of Christ, was, in that, or in any other respect, a *wilful liar*; and therefore not to be credited in any thing, an article which he has laboured so much in his last publication?

5. Has he proved that there was a church of orthodox Jewish christians at Jerusalem after the time of Adrian?—another article on which he has bestowed much pains in his last piece.

6. Has he invalidated any thing that I have advanced to prove that Athanasius, and others of the Fathers, represented the apostles as having been obliged to use great caution in teaching the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, and that of the trinity, lest it should shock the prejudices of the  
first

first converts in favour of the doctrines of the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ?

7. Has he proved that the Jews in our Saviour's time were believers in the doctrine of the trinity, that they expected the second person of it in the character of their Messiah, and consequently that the apostles considered Christ as God from the time that they considered him as the Messiah?

8. Has he proved that the unitarians were considered as heretics in early times?

9. Has he proved that prayers for succour in external persecution are properly addressed to Christ?

10. Has he proved that by the *generation of the Son*, all the Fathers meant a *display of his powers*, and not his assuming a *proper personality*, from having been a mere attribute of the Father?

11. Has he proved that there is no difference between the doctrine of the personification of the logos, and the peculiar opinions of the Arians: than which I have asserted that no schemes were ever more directly opposed to each other?

12. Has he proved the antiquity of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ from the writings of Barnabas, and Ignatius?

13. Has

13. Has he proved the origin of the Son, the second person in the trinity, from the Father's contemplating his own perfections? an opinion, I believe, peculiar to himself, unsupported by any authority, ancient or modern. I think I perceive that, with respect to this curious particular, he has not given *you* entire satisfaction; since, with respect to *all* schemes to explain the doctrine of the trinity, you say, p. 42, "they leave us just where we were, totally in the dark." Indeed, I do not wonder that a notion so super-eminently absurd, so void of all foundation in the scriptures, in common sense, or primitive antiquity, should not recommend itself to those who do not wish to expose the doctrine of the trinity, as absolutely ridiculous.

Indeed, Sir, to undertake the defence of your applauded champion on these articles (and I might have extended the list to many more) is an Herculean attempt. Greatly must the execution of it swell the work you have in hand, and well may you crave indulgence, p. 32, as to the article of *time*. I think it must appear, to all impartial readers, that Dr. Horsley has been completely foiled in his attempts to prove any one of the above-mentioned particulars, and every other that is of any importance to the real merits of the question between us. And if this be the case, what signifies the great superiority of his *learning*. Nay, if all his superior ability, and learning



learning has not enabled him to prove what he so earnestly contended for, does it not afford an argument, that neither learning, nor ability, *can* be of any avail in the cause that he has espoused?

Utterly unable to make any plausible defence of himself in *other* articles, after waiting eighteen months, with an air of insolence peculiar to himself (which you, Sir, tacitly condemn, by recommending a mode of conducting controversy, the very reverse of his) he challenged me again with respect to *the veracity of Origen*, and the existence of a church of orthodox Jewish christians at Jerusalem after the time of Adrian. But in my Reply, which was immediate, I have shewn that, instead of relieving himself, he has involved himself in much greater confusion and difficulty than ever; having grossly misunderstood every one of the five passages from the Fathers which he produced in his defence. In this Reply of mine, which has been published about six months, I call upon him to defend himself, and his argument; in such a manner as, I believe, there is no example of any person being called upon (except Mr. White, of Oxford, by myself). In the conclusion I say, "On this article, at least, an article deliberately selected by yourself, let the controversy between us come to a fair issue. Nothing has been, or shall be, wanting on my part; and therefore the public will certainly expect your explicit and speedy answer."

What,

What, Sir, can you think of a man who can sit down contented without making any reply to such a call as this? Had any person called upon *me* in this manner, he would have had my Reply (either vindicating myself, or acknowledging my inability to do it) in a week, or as soon as it had been physically possible for it to be dispatched.

When you speak of the great *learning* of Dr. Horsley, it is to be supposed that you speak of so much of it as is *before the world*; and we have not yet seen enough to justify your very high encomiums. If the world should happen to think less highly of it than you do, they may say that the thanks of the church of England were very lightly bestowed.

To confine ourselves to this controversy (and you do not profess to look any farther) will you say that you infer his superior learning from his translating *idwls* by the English word *idiot* \*;

\* If any authority could be wanting in support of my interpretation of the word *idwls*, I might quote that of the famous Bentley, whose learning will hardly be called in question by Dr. Horsley himself. In his remarks on a work intitled, *A Discourse on Free-thinking*, p. 118, he expresses himself in the following manner with respect to that very translation of this word, which Dr. Horsley adopted, and Mr. Badcock defends.

“ *Ab Idiotis Evangelistis*, By *idiot evangelists*, says our author; who, if he is sincere in this version, proves himself a very *idiot* in the Greek and Latin acceptation of that word.  
 “ *Idwls*, *Idiota*; *illiteratus*, *indoctus*, *rudis*. See Du Fresne  
 “ in his Glossaries, who takes notice that *idiot*a for an *idiot*, or  
 “ *natural fool*, is peculiar to your English law, for which he  
 “ cites

from his arguing from the pronoun *ἐγώ*, as necessarily referring to a *person*; from his saying that *ἐκ ἄλλω τινι ἢ* cannot be rendered *by nothing but*; from his taking the part of Mr. Badcock in rendering *ἄλλοι γὰρ καὶ ἄλλον τρόπον*, *others on another plan*, or from his construction of Jerom's *quid dicam*? These are almost all the specimens that he has exhibited of his profound acquaintance with the learned languages in the course of this controversy; and, in the opinion of many, who are not without pretensions to scholarship, it will not be to the credit of the Dean of Canterbury to praise any man so very highly on these accounts.

There are many also, who do not think so highly as you do of Dr. Horsley's merit with respect to the church of England, or the doctrine of the trinity, as one of its articles. And there are, I believe, at this moment, many unitarians, who think themselves under greater obligations to him, than any trinitarians whatever. For to him has been owing, in a great measure, the present discussion of the subject, which must now proceed till the great question be decided; and with respect to the final issue, judging from his acknowledged

“ cites Rastal. Did Victor therefore mean *idiot evangelists* in  
 “ your English sense? No, but *illiterate, unlearned*. What  
 “ then must we think of our author for his scandalous trans-  
 “ lation here. Whether imputation will he chuse to lie un-  
 “ der, that he knew the meaning of Victor, or that he knew  
 “ it not?” Dr. Horsley must suppose the same question put  
 to himself.

ability



ability to defend the doctrine of the trinity, as far as it is defensible, they entertain no doubt at all; being confident that scripture, reason, and antiquity, will be found equally in their favour.

It is the earnest wish of all unitarians, and of none more than myself, that your high encomiums may bring your champion into the field again. I have done every thing in my power, and in my way, to second your wishes. But as he took eighteen months to make his last reply, he may be like a comet, whose periodical revolution is that period of time, and if so, it will be in vain that we endeavour to accelerate the course of nature.

As you are so lavish in your praise of *one* of your champions, I wonder you should overlook the merit of others, such as Mr. Burgh, who had the title of LL.D. conferred upon him at Oxford, for his answer to Mr. Lindsey; Mr. White, who has stepped into the arena with *looks* of stouter defiance than any of you, though his *deeds* do not seem to correspond to them; and Mr. Howes, who has undertaken the most difficult department in the whole discussion, viz. to prove that the Jews were always trinitarians (which is the counterpart of Moliere's *Medecin malgré lui*) and that there were no unitarians at all till about the council of Nice. Time will shew how ingeniously he will maintain such paradoxes as these.

I am, &c.

C

LETTER

## L E T T E R III.

*Of the Interference of Civil Power in Matters of Religion.*

REV. SIR,

THERE is one article of considerable importance on which you have touched in these Sermons of yours, with respect to which you seem to be under a mistake yourself, and will probably mislead others. I wish, therefore, to set you right before the publication of your larger work.

You more than hint, that the consequence of the general prevalence of unitarianism, will be the exclusion of trinitarians from the church. You even suggest, that it is our wish, and intention, to apply external force, in order to bring this about, whenever we shall think the times sufficiently ripe for such a measure. "A zealous anti-trinitarian," you say, p. 10, "may fancy that those idolatrous churches and kingdoms require to be quickened in their progress towards destruction. He may conceive himself to be in duty bound to become an instrument in executing the vengeance of heaven upon them, for refusing to admit an Arian

" or

“or Socinian reformation, tendered in a milder  
“way.”

With respect to this insinuation, I can only say, that nothing has yet been advanced by any unitarian that can give the least colour to it. It is not consistent with your usual candour, and what no appearances whatever have made at all probable. Indeed, Sir, we see no occasion to have recourse to an *arm of flesh*, in this contest. We have a certain prospect of victory by the mere force of *argument*, and without any risk whatever. I can appeal to the uniform tenor of all my writings, and especially my *Address to Protestant Dissenters as such*, if I have not always inculcated the most peaceable methods of promoting reformation, and have not even gone farther to recommend the patient suffering of wrong than most other writers.

I must produce another passage from your Sermons, relating to the intolerance of unitarians. “Let us only suppose,” you say, p. 4, “that the direction of ecclesiastical matters in this kingdom, should pass into the hands of those persons who regard the doctrine of the trinity as involving in it an absurdity equal to that of transubstantiation, and as being the grand obstacle to the conversion of Jews, Mahometans, and Deists; who deem the worship of Christ to be gross idolatry, and high treason against the majesty of the one  
C 2 “supreme



“supreme God; must not the new unitarian  
 “church, with its confession and services, be so  
 “constituted, as utterly, and for ever, to exclude  
 “us from becoming members of it? Most un-  
 “doubtedly, and of necessity it must. An unita-  
 “rian people, we are told, will not long be satisf-  
 “fied with a trinitarian establishment. Indeed  
 “I suppose they will not. They will endeavour  
 “to overturn it, and it is our business to prevent  
 “them from so doing.”

Now, Sir, had you given more attention to the  
 nature of the case, you could never have appre-  
 hended any danger to yourself, or to any trinitarians,  
 from an unitarian liturgy, because it would con-  
 tain nothing offensive to you, nothing in which you  
 could not heartily join: whereas, we are absolutely  
 excluded from joining in your worship, by your tri-  
 nitarian forms. While you acknowledge *one God*  
 (which you always profess to do) you may surely  
 address your prayers to that one God, calling him,  
 as you are authorized to do in the scriptures, *the*  
*maker of heaven and earth, the God and Father of*  
*our Lord Jesus Christ, the one true God*, as our Sa-  
 viour calls him, the great being who *sent him*, who  
*raised him from the dead*, and who *gave him glory*.  
 For it is to this God that all unitarians pray; and  
 to a being of this description you trinitarians may  
 also pray, so long as you can accommodate to your  
 notions this scripture language, and suppose Jesus  
 Christ

Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit, to be in any manner included in this definition, or description, of *the one true God*. This is a mental process of your own, with which yourselves only are concerned, and in which we have nothing to do. If you can, by any means, accommodate such language as that above-mentioned to your peculiar sentiments, in reading the scriptures, in which it perpetually occurs, you may do the same in our forms of worship.

We can now join in using the Lord's prayer, and in almost all the service of the church of England, except the *litany*; so that there is very little that is offensive to an unitarian in the whole of your afternoon service. Remove, therefore, only your subscriptions to articles of faith, and reform your morning service after the model of that in the afternoon, and I believe you will remove the greatest of our objections. We are not, I assure you, so fond of *schism* as to stand out for trifles; but do not compel, or tempt us, to pay supreme worship to a fellow creature, to a man like ourselves; who, though highly honoured by God for his virtue and obedience, was so far from considering himself *as God*, that, with the most genuine humility, he always ascribed every thing that he said, or did, to his Father that sent him, and worshipped him with the same deep reverence that he inculcated upon all his followers.

If, Sir, you would, without prejudice, look into *Mr. Lindsey's reformed liturgy*, you would soon be satisfied, that there is nothing in it but what you yourself could join in, with much devotion and advantage. Read, if you please, my own *Forms of devotion for unitarian societies*, and I am confident you will find nothing in them offensive to yourself, except the prayer for Easter Sunday; and to accommodate you, and other trinitarians, I shall have no objection to the omission of it. I will go much farther than *you* are disposed to do, for the sake of a peaceable accommodation.

But I do not expect, or hope for, any thing of an intermediate kind. Your system is so complex, and involves such an unnatural connexion of things ecclesiastical with things civil, that though you might know where to begin a reformation, you will never be able to agree among yourselves where to stop. It must, therefore, be done in a manner in which the leading persons in the church and state will not be the primary agents. When this will be effected, or by whom, I do not pretend to form any conjecture. This is not my business, but a much easier and plainer task, viz. to investigate, and to propagate that *truth*, which in God's own way, and his own time, cannot fail to bring about all that I wish; when a pure *unitarian worship* will be universally adopted, and with universal consent. In the mean time, do not you, and your brethren, *fear where no fear is*, or alarm others

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with



with apprehensions of our intolerance, which if you seriously reflect, you cannot really entertain yourselves.

I the less wonder at your not readily supposing that *we* would content ourselves with the mere force of truth, when I see that, notwithstanding your profession of universal toleration, you cannot help intimating, that you think there is some reason for that *alliance of church and state*, of which, as christians, you ought to be ashamed. In these very Sermons you more than insinuate the *propriety*, if not the *policy*, of penal laws in matters of religion; when you say concerning the doctrine of the trinity, p. 47, that "it requires, and demands, the support of every state wishing to enjoy the favour and protection of that God, who for gracious purposes has revealed it." For how is a state, as such, to *support* any particular doctrine, but by civil rewards and punishments? The civil power has no other method of supporting any thing. These are its proper arms, which alone it can employ to effect all its purposes. The doctrine of transubstantiation is supported in the same manner. Like the doctrine of the trinity, *it requires and demands* such support. Happily, unitarianism neither requires, nor demands it, any more than christianity itself did for the space of three hundred years. Nay, they both are able to make their way in spite of all the opposition that your present supporters and protectors, the powers of this world, can give to them.

I should think, Sir, that a man of your good sense, could not but see, that any mode of religion is in a very unnatural and aukward predicament, which *requires*, and *demand*s any *civil support*, because it throws itself under the protection, and is of course at the mercy, of a power which may equally promote truth or falsehood, christianity, mahometanism, or paganism. For if the civil power, as such, has a right to establish any one mode of religion, it must have the same right to establish any other. If this great business be left to the discretion of our civil governors, it must also be left to their indiscretion. And what judges can you suppose such persons as constitute our two houses of parliament to be of these matters? Yet I am willing to think they may be as able theologians as those who have the ordering of these things in other countries.

Would you trust the members of our parliament with the choice of your physician, or allow them to prescribe the mode of treatment of you, if your life was in danger; or would you think of appealing to them with respect to the truth of a theory in philosophy; and yet I think them as likely to decide justly in a case of *medicine*, or *philosophy*, as with respect to *religion*.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## L E T T E R IV.

*Of some particular Arguments for the Doctrine of the Trinity.*

REV. SIR,

I Wish not to enter into the discussion of any particular arguments for the doctrine of the trinity at this time, reserving myself till the publication of your *large work*; and for the execution of this I am willing to give you as much *time* as you request, p. 32, since you say you wish (and in this I sincerely join you) “to execute the work “with care and attention;” as we shall then, I doubt not, see all that *can* be urged in support of your opinions. But there are a few things that it may not be improper to apprize you of before hand; and you may take, or neglect, the hints I shall give, as you shall see reason.

You say, Note, p. 42, “All disputation concerning the manner of the distinction, the manner of the union, the manner of the generation, “and the manner of the procession, is needless “and fruitless. Needless, because, if we have “divine authority for the *fact*, it sufficeth. That “is all we are concerned to know. Fruitless, “because it is a disputation without ideas. Af-  
“ter



“ter a long, tedious, intricate, and perplexed  
 “controversy, we find ourselves—just where we  
 “were—totally in the dark. Such has been the  
 “case respecting this, and other questions. God  
 “is pleased to reveal the fact, man insists upon  
 “apprehending the mode. In his present state  
 “he cannot apprehend it. He therefore denies  
 “the fact, and commences unbeliever.”

Now, Sir, you must know, that all this that you say respecting the doctrine of the trinity is continually said by the catholics, in defence of the doctrine of transubstantiation. As a protestant, you yourself must allege, that every real *fact* has some *mode*, or *manner*, of being what it is, and every true proposition must be understood in some sense or other; and therefore, that if every conceivable mode, or manner of a fact, imply an impossibility, and every sense of a proposition imply an absurdity, the doctrine itself is untrue, and therefore that it cannot be taught in the scriptures, if they teach nothing but truth. You, consequently, explain those passages of scripture which are urged in support of the doctrine of transubstantiation, in a manner different from the catholics, who hold that doctrine; and if the literal sense will not answer your purpose, you very properly, and sensibly, have recourse to a figurative one, which is all that we are charged with doing, with respect to the doctrine of the trinity.

We

We say that every possible definition of that doctrine implies an absurdity; and that the *fact* of the *trinity in unity* must exist in some manner or other, but that every conceivable mode or manner implies an impossibility, and therefore the existence of the thing itself must be impossible also; and consequently, that if it was necessary to interpret a few texts, which you think teach that doctrine in the same, or a similar manner, to that which you use with respect to those that are supposed to teach the doctrine of transubstantiation, we should be authorised to do it.

We do not wonder that sensible trinitarians are averse to all discussion of the *mode* of subsistence of *three persons in one undivided essence*; because they have found that every attempt to define this subject has only tended to expose it to ridicule. But notwithstanding this, no trinitarian, who imagines that he *can* explain this mysterious doctrine, ever fails to propose his explanation, knowing the great advantage it would be to his argument, if he could hit upon any thing of this kind that would be unexceptionable. Witness the incredible number of illustrations of this doctrine among the ancients, and also among the moderns, and especially the last most curious one of Dr. Horsley, *Though last not least*. Nay, in boldness of thought, he has gone beyond any of his predecessors, maintaining, that the production of the Son was the necessary consequence of the Father's

ther's contemplating his own perfections. Athanasius himself would have stood amazed at the sublimity of the idea. Could you yourself, Sir, imagine that *you* had hit upon any new and happy mode of illustrating this doctrine, you would, I doubt not, think it no inconsiderable advantage to your argument. And who can tell what may be the result of the close attention that you propose to give to your great work, in all the *time* that you may think proper to bestow upon it.

You say, p. 37, that "the authority of all the three persons is the same, their power equal, their persons undivided, and their glory one." But if you do not use words without ideas, and which convey no more meaning than *Datifi*, *Bocardo*, *Ferison*, in logic, you must have some notion in your own mind in what *sense* the proposition to which you give your assent *may be true*. For otherwise you must think that it *may be false*; so that disquisitions concerning the *mode* or *manner*, which you reprobate so strongly, are absolutely unavoidable for the satisfaction of your own mind.

All particular propositions are reducible to abstract ones, and those abstract ones are predicable of other particulars. Now if it be true, that *three divine persons* may make only *one God*, it must be true in general, that *three* may be *one*, and also



*in the same sense*, if each of the divine persons want nothing to make them *perfect God*. But is this abstract proposition true of any thing else?

This reasoning all protestants urge against the doctrine of transubstantiation. For if it be true, that the sacramental *bread* may take the substance of *flesh*, and yet retain every property of bread, the substance of *other* things may also be changed, while the properties remain unchanged. But if no such change can be made to appear probable, in any other instance, you justly reject the supposition universally. In the same manner, I will undertake to shew, that, on whatever principles you can defend the doctrine of the trinity, I can, *mutatis mutandis*, defend that of transubstantiation. Take your own choice of arguments, from reason or from the scriptures.

With respect to several of your arguments from *the scriptures* (on which, as you reject all arguments from *reason*, you justly lay so much stress) instead of giving us the plain words of scripture, you give your own arbitrary construction of it.

By "being baptized into the name of God," you say, p. 34, "can be meant no less than entering into a covenant with a person as God, professing faith in him as such, enlisting one's self into his service, and vowing all obedience and submission to him. Such is the natural, the

“ the obvious import of this rite, by which we  
 “ are admitted into the church of Christ, this  
 “ solemn form of baptizing in the name of the  
 “ Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,  
 “ that is, into the faith, service, and worship of  
 “ the Holy Trinity. For let us reflect a little.  
 “ The nations were to be baptized in the name  
 “ of three persons, in the *same manner*, and there-  
 “ fore surely in the *same sense*, as in the name of  
 “ one. Whatever honour, reverence, or regard,  
 “ is paid to the Father in this solemn rite, the  
 “ same we cannot but suppose paid to all three.  
 “ Is he acknowledged as the object of worship,  
 “ so are the other two persons likewise. Is he  
 “ the God and Lord over us, so are they. Are  
 “ we his servants, subjects, and soldiers, enrolled  
 “ under him, so are we equally under all, &c. &c.”  
 You also say, note, p. 3, that “ baptizing in the  
 “ name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy  
 “ Ghost, is declaring the sacred three to be one  
 “ God, and that no man, who had been baptized  
 “ according to this form, could be ignorant of  
 “ the doctrine.”

Now all this, as I have said, is not *scripture*,  
 but your own arbitrary *construction* of scripture.  
 Where do you find it laid down as a maxim, that  
 baptizing into the name of any person is acknow-  
 ledging that person for God? And how does  
*baptizing* in the name of three persons imply their  
 equality, any more than doing any thing else that  
 respects

respects them all? May not three persons, of very different ranks, be with propriety named together? Do we not read, 1 Chron. xxix. 20. that “the people of Israel *bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king?*” By an argument therefore exactly, and in all its forms, similar to yours, it may be proved, that *God and the king*, being equally objects of worship, must be equal. Was not the *action* of bowing down, and the *manner* of performing it, the same respecting both? Must it not, then, have been done in the same *sense*?

That the phrase, *being baptized unto a person*, or *in the name* of a person, which must be the same thing, does not imply that the person in whose name the baptism is made is God, may be clearly inferred from Paul’s saying, 1 Cor. x. 2. that the Israelites were *baptized unto Moses* (not *by Moses*) *in the cloud and in the sea*. He meant into the religion that was published by Moses. Consequently, being baptized *unto Christ*, or *in the name of Christ*, only means into the profession of the religion which was published by Christ. This must be our inference, if it be allowed, that the scriptures are their own best interpreters, the same phrases being generally used in the same sense. The *holy spirit* is used because, according to the phraseology of scripture, the gospel was confirmed, or proved to be of God, by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Had



Had there been so much solemn and mysterious meaning implied in the phrase of *baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit*, as you suppose; had it been intended as a standing assertion of the doctrine of a trinity in the divine nature, it might have been expected, both that there would have been some express declaration that this *was* the intent of it, and also that those words should always have been used when the office was performed. But no such declaration of the meaning of the phrase is to be found in the scriptures; and it is remarkable, that all the baptisms we read of in the New Testament, are baptisms *in the name of Christ* only. Must we say that this was another instance of the *caution* with which the apostles taught the doctrine of the trinity?

You say, .p. 2, “ that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are three persons in one God, is a truth proposed to us as the ground of our hope, our comfort, and our joy; as the principle on which the conduct of life is to be framed, accepted, and rewarded.” But surely, Sir, these assertions are most extravagant, and unauthorised. Admitting this doctrine of the trinity to be true, where do you find one text in which it is proposed to us in any of these lights, as the ground of our hope, our comfort, or our joy; as the principle on which our conduct is to be framed, accepted, and rewarded?

Indeed,

Indeed, I do not think it possible to conceive how such a doctrine as this can answer any of those purposes. What ideas you annex to the terms, *framing one's conduct upon the doctrine of the trinity*, I cannot imagine. How the doctrine of a *future life*, or that of the *divine placability*, are principles on which the conduct of life is to be formed, I clearly understood; because the belief of them is of great use as a motive to good conduct. But how to make any such practical use of the doctrine of the *trinity*, I no more perceive, than I do, that its sister doctrine of *transubstantiation* should be a practical one.

You say, p. 43, " Upon the very best authority  
 " we are informed, that Christ was the *lamb slain*  
 " *from the foundation of the world*, that is (for it  
 " cannot be otherwise understood ?) slain in effect,  
 " in the divine purpose and counsel. It is like-  
 " wise said, that grace *was given us in Christ Jesus*  
 " *before the world began*. The words intimate, that  
 " previous to the creation of the world, something  
 " had passed in our favour above, that the plan of  
 " our future redemption was then laid, that some  
 " agreement, some covenant relative to it, had been  
 " entered into. Grace was given us not in our pro-  
 " per persons; for as yet we were not, we had no  
 " being; but in the person of him who was after-  
 " wards to become our representative, our Sa-  
 " viour — in Christ Jesus. Now the plan must  
 " have been laid, the covenant entered into, by the  
 D " parties

“ parties who have since been graciously pleased  
 “ to concern themselves in its execution. Who  
 “ these are we cannot be ignorant. It was the  
 “ Son of God, who took our nature upon him,  
 “ and in that nature made a full and sufficient  
 “ oblation, satisfaction, and atonement, for the  
 “ sins of the world. It was the Father, who ac-  
 “ cepted such oblation, satisfaction, and atone-  
 “ ment. It was the Holy Spirit who came forth  
 “ from the Father and the Son, through the  
 “ preaching of the word, and the administration  
 “ of the sacraments, by his enlightening, healing,  
 “ and comforting grace, to apply to the hearts of  
 “ men, for all the purposes of pardon, sanctifica-  
 “ tion, and salvation, the merits and benefits of  
 “ that oblation, satisfaction, and atonement.”

This is a most remarkable example of drawing  
 many and great conclusions from small premises,  
 indeed, from no premises at all. By *grace given us*  
*in Christ Jesus before the world began*, can be under-  
 stood nothing more, according to your own mode  
 of interpretation, than that it was in the original  
 counsel of God, that we should be favoured with  
 the blessings of the gospel ; which no more implies  
 that *Christ* pre-existed, than that *we* ourselves did.  
 Besides, no mention is here made of the Holy  
 Spirit, and still less of any *covenant* being made be-  
 tween the three, of the Son proposing, the Father  
 accepting, and the Spirit applying. This is not  
*interpreting*, but absolutely *making* scripture. Where  
 do



do you read of any such covenant as this but in Milton's Paradise Lost?

Really, Sir, the scriptures, in the plainest of all language, teach a doctrine the very reverse of what you here lay down, viz. that God, even the Father, seeing the deplorable condition of mankind, of his own motion, sent first the prophets, and then that *prophet, mighty in word and deed* (Luke xxiv. 19.) his own son, to save them; and confirmed his mission by those miracles which are called *the gifts of his spirit*, or the same divine power that appeared in Christ; who says, that *the words which he spake were not his own*, and that *the Father within him did the works*. Reconcile this language with your doctrine of the perfect equality of the Son to the Father, if you can.

I could, in like manner, easily go over your other arguments from scripture, and shew that all the foundations of this great article of your faith are equally weak. They are indeed, most apparently so. You cannot wonder then, that unitarians should write with confidence, when they have nothing but such arguments to answer.

I am, &c.

## LETTER V.

*Miscellaneous Articles, and Conclusion.*

REV. SIR,

**A**LL the friends of ecclesiastical establishments insist upon the right of the civil magistrate to use his own best judgment, in choosing the religion that shall be supported at the expence of the state, especially if the majority of the people should be of the same opinion with him. In Ireland, no regard is paid to this latter circumstance. For there the members of the established church, which takes the tythes of the whole kingdom, are, I believe, computed at little more than one-tenth of the people. This, in my opinion, is the most bare-faced tyranny. You, however, have mentioned one circumstance, which may serve to shew how little stress you can sometimes lay on the sentiments either of the civil governors, or the majority of the people. For you say, p. 14, "Athanasius once stood single against the world, and prevailed." His opinion, therefore, was not, by your own confession, either that of the generality of the people, or that of the governing powers. You must therefore think that,  
a very

a very small minority may be in the right, and finally prevail against *numbers* and *power* combined. In the time of Constantius, you must acknowledge that Arianism, or unitarianism, was the general opinion. And by what means was it that Athanasianism became prevalent? Can you reflect upon the history of those times, and think that it would ever have become so, if it had not been for the support it afterwards had from the governing powers? It has the same support at this day. But even this will not be able to preserve it much longer. You see how it loses ground in America, since it has lost the countenance of government there.

2. You say, p. 40, Note, "I do not see my Saviour only in a few detached passages of either Testament. I see him conducting the economy of the divine dispensations through both, from the creation to the consummation of all things, as the דבר יהוה, the מלאך יהוה, the λογος θεος. Dr. Allix and Mr. Taylor have both demonstrated this point. It is only to be wished, the latter had drawn the conclusion drawn by the former — the just and proper conclusion — that the person spoken of must indeed be VERY God."

Upon this subject, Sir, I would earnestly recommend to you, what I dare say, you have never yet



perused, viz. the account which the learned Basnage (in his truly excellent *History of the Jews*) has given of their sentiments with respect to the Messiah, and Mr. Lindsey's reply to Mr. Taylor, in the *Sequel to his Apology*. This, I think, it is barely possible to read, without being convinced, that there is no weight whatever in any thing that is alleged by Mr. Taylor. You consider it as the clearest of all truths, that Christ was the person by whom God spake to Moses and the prophets. But indeed, Sir, this notion is directly contrary to what is asserted in the first verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which we read, *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets, both in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son*. What can be more evident from this, than that God spake to mankind by his son only *in the last days*, or the times of the gospel, and not in any former period of time? Yet you say that Socinians put forced and unnatural constructions on the language of scripture.

I heartily join with you, Sir, in your exhortation to excite the zeal of the learned members of your church, in the defence of its peculiar doctrines, and also to interest the *common people* in this controversy. With respect to every argument of importance, these are as capable of judging as we can pretend to be. Let the twenty thousand copies of the pamphlet, recommended by you, p. 20, be  
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immediately printed and dispersed. I fear not the consequence. It was, I find, one of the many pieces that were written to counteract the effect of one of my own, entitled, *An Appeal to the serious Professors of Christianity*, many of which have been dispersed, and with a success far exceeding my expectations from it. A like advantage to what I think to be the cause of truth, has resulted from the publication of another small piece, entitled, *A general View of the Arguments for the Unity of God, and against the Divinity or Pre-existence of Christ, from Reason, from the Scriptures, and from History*.

My principal expectations, however, are from the ingenuous youth, whose prejudices are not so rivetted as those of persons more advanced in life; and for this reason I shall take the liberty to address a few letters to those young men in the two universities, who are intended for the service of the church. They will, of course, read your publications, and I hope they will do me, or rather themselves, and the cause of truth, the justice to read both sides.

You are pleased to say of my conduct, in one respect, p. 12, "It is fair, it is manly, it is noble, "it is kind." Be assured, Sir, you shall never find it otherwise. And be this controversy of longer or shorter continuance, I shall be mindful of the advice you give to your friends, p. 9, "that

“it be conducted in an honourable way, according to the laws of war.” In this respect, I have uniformly observed one rule, which you, Sir, as well as most of my antagonists, have neglected; which is, to send a copy of my tracts to every person who is particularly noticed in them. This has always appeared to me to be fair and proper; and I wish that, for the future, it may be considered as indispensable in these literary contests.

Having nothing farther, of much consequence, to address to yourself in particular, I conclude with once more assuring you, that I think myself singularly happy in having found so learned and candid an antagonist; and waiting your own time (reminding you, however, of my own motto, *Ars longa, vita brevis*) for the appearance of your large work, I subscribe myself, with the greatest respect,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

J. P R I E S T L E Y.

BIRMINGHAM,

MARCH 1, 1787.



# L E T T E R S

TO THE

## Y O U N G M E N,

WHO ARE IN A

Course of Education for the Christian Ministry,

AT THE

Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Multa ferunt anni venientes commoda secum,  
Multa recedentes adimunt.

HORACE.

LETTERS  
TO THE  
YOUNG MEN

Committee of Education for the Christian Ministry

University of Oxford and Cambridge

First Series

Vol. I

Part I

Chapter I

Of the Nature and Extent of the Christian Ministry

Section I

Of the Office of the Minister of the Gospel

Section II

Of the Qualifications of the Minister of the Gospel

Section III

Of the Duties of the Minister of the Gospel

Section IV

Of the Rewards of the Minister of the Gospel

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# L E T T E R S

TO THE

Y O U N G M E N, &c.

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## L E T T E R I.

*Of Subscription to Articles of Faith.*

GENTLEMEN,

**E**XCUSE the address of a stranger, whose apology for it is an earnest desire of contributing what may be in his power to your forming a right judgment concerning some subjects, which it imports you to understand, and of giving you such representations of things as you are not so likely to receive from any other quarter. In many things, no doubt, your professors and tutors, are much better qualified to give you instruction, than I can pretend to be; and with respect to these, I am very willing to submit to their superiority, and to yours. But with respect to some other things, you may easily imagine, that they  
may



may not have been in the way of having their own attention called to them so much as mine has been; and therefore, with the best intentions in the world, in the discharge of their duty to you, they will naturally be less explicit in their instructions. It is in no other case that I would presume to solicit your attention. To your own good sense, and candour, I therefore entirely refer myself. If by reading this address you should see any thing in a new and juster light than you have hitherto done, my end will be answered; and if not, it will not be much of your time that will be lost upon it. My own time I cannot better employ, than in making the attempt.

As those who are designed to teach the principles of the christian religion to the rest of the community, I consider you as destined to fill a station of the greatest honour and importance in your country; and I wish you to be truly sensible of the honour and importance of it; not to make you proud of the rank it will give you, but to inspire you with an earnest desire, and a laudable ambition, to discharge the duties of it in the best manner. For in this case only, does any man either receive honour from his station, or do honour to it.

In order to teach religion with advantage to others, you will agree with me that it ought to be well understood by yourselves; and we cannot expect

expect to understand any thing of this consequence, without giving proper *time* to the study of it. Articles of faith are things of moment, and therefore we should not form a hasty judgment concerning them, but deliberately weigh before we decide. And in this respect it is that I must take the liberty to request you seriously to consider the propriety of your present customs, as you are required to subscribe to what it cannot be supposed you have had sufficient time to *study*, and therefore cannot be supposed to *understand*.

Such a custom suited perfectly well with the times of darkness and bigotry, in which it was established. The great object then was the public profession of the same faith, which it was thought could not be secured too early; and the extinction of all schism, which it was thought could not be too carefully guarded against; and not *solid instruction*, and a well grounded knowledge of what was professed. This could not have been gained without previous *enquiry*, and discussion, in which there would have been some hazard of persons forming different judgments; and then the favourite article of the *unity of the catholic church* would have been in danger of being broken.

But, happily, we now see things in a very different light. We refuse to receive the principles of *philosophy*, and certainly should not receive those of *religion*, without being satisfied, from proper evidence,

evidence, with respect to their truth. Whatever use there may be in *union*, there cannot be any in *ignorance*, or in an agreement in words without an agreement in ideas. And it is in vain for persons to pretend to an agreement in judgment, when none of them have formed any proper *judgment* in the case; having made no previous *enquiry*, on which alone such a judgment can be formed. Two blind men may agree in their evidence with respect to the colour of an object, but would any jury be influenced by such evidence? And no better than this is the agreement of men in articles of faith, concerning the truth of which they have made no enquiry.

Persons can then only be properly said to think alike, when they see things in the same light, and when the same arguments have the same weight with them. But in order to this, there must be a previous clear perception of the *subject* concerning which a judgment is to be formed, and an equally clear perception of the nature and force of the *evidence* on which it is formed. Also, the more important any subject is, the greater care should be taken to form a right judgment concerning it. Since, therefore, *religion* is of all subjects the most important, it behoves us to take the greatest *care*, and consequently to employ the most *time*, in investigating the principles of it.

By



By no means, then, ever declare your assent to any articles of faith (and the most solemn of all declarations is the mode of subscription) before you have carefully considered what each of those articles is, and have really satisfied yourselves that you see the evidence on which the truth of them is founded. If the subscription be tendered to you before that process has commenced, or before it can have been completed, resolutely decline it. It becomes every honest man so to do: because otherwise he signs he knows not what; though he virtually says that he has *considered* what he has done, and is satisfied with respect to the propriety of it. If you would not set your hand to a common bond, without previously reading it, and approving of it, surely your minds ought to revolt at the idea of subscribing articles of faith which you have not examined. And yet some, I fear, do this without having so much as read them, or being able to say what propositions they have signed their assent to.

The probability is, that the greater part of you, who will ever think of reading this address, have already subscribed the articles of the church of England; having done it at your matriculation\*, that is, on your admission to that place of education in which you were to study them, than

\* This I have since been informed is only the case at Oxford. At Cambridge the students are only obliged to attend the service of the church of England, and on taking the degree of *bachelor* to declare that, they are *bona fide* members of it. They do not subscribe the articles till they take the degree of *Doctor*.  
which

which nothing more preposterous can well be imagined. In this case, as persons who have unintentionally done wrong, proceed no farther, and do not, by availing yourselves of any advantages accruing from it, make that to be a deliberate falsehood, which originally was nothing more than an oversight. Truth and uprightness require that you renounce your subscription, and every thing consequent upon it. Because, till you be satisfied that what you have subscribed is true, so that you could *bona fide* repeat the subscription, you ought to consider yourselves as not having subscribed at all.

I take it for granted, you will not think that *religion* is the only subject with respect to which a person may be lawfully guilty of a known falsehood, or prevarication; or that God, in whose presence the subscription is made, is the only Being who may be safely mocked and trifled with. What can you hereafter say to any man, who shall have made a false declaration of any other kind, or have taken a false oath, when you will be conscious to yourselves that you have made a declaration in which there was as little sincerity, and that you made a solemn profession of what you did not know to be true, or might have known to be false; and that you reap the benefit of such false declaration and profession?

This, Gentlemen, is a case that will not bear arguing. Every upright mind must decide upon

it immediately, and all the attempts that have been made to apologize for subscription to articles of faith that are not really believed, or, which is the same thing, have never been examined, or for holding the possession of any thing to which such a subscription introduced a man, can only expose the chicanery of those who have recourse to them. In any other case similar to this, every clergyman would say with David, *As the Lord liveth, such a thing ought not to be.* But how many of them are there, to whom, after such a declaration, it might be said, *Thou art the man?*

This is certainly the case with all Arians and Socinians in the church of England, of all who admit the principles of *Dr. Clarke's Treatise on the Trinity*, or any other, in which the Son of God is maintained to be, in any sense, inferior to the Father, or to be no proper object of prayer. For in one of your creeds it is expressly said, *that of the three persons in the trinity, no one of them is before or after the other, &c.* and in your litany petitions are addressed to God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as well as to God the Father.

With the greatest respect, I am,

Gentlemen,

Your sincere well-wisher,

J. PRIESTLEY.

E                      L E T T E R



## LETTER II.

*Of the Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity.*

GENTLEMEN,

THOUGH I do not mean to trouble you with my thoughts on many articles of your christian faith, there is *one* which, on account of its peculiar magnitude, I cannot help recommending to your most deliberate consideration, viz. *the object of religious worship*. From the nature of the thing, you cannot but be sensible, that *this* must be an article of the first and last importance; and therefore on this subject you certainly ought not to form a hasty or rash judgment, but bring to the study of it your best faculties, and give it your closest attention.

In a matter of this consequence, let no man, or body of men, judge for you, but honestly and fairly judge for yourselves; because you are individually responsible for the use you make of your faculties. Consider that, on the very same principle on which any person in this country may imagine that he may safely acquiesce in the judgment of the church of England, a person in France or Italy will be justified in acquiescing in the judgment of the church of Rome, and may  
receive

receive without examination the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the worship of Mary and all the Saints.

If you are sensible that they ought not to bow down and worship Mary, on the authority of the church of Rome, neither ought you to worship the Son of Mary, on the authority of the church of England, but should first satisfy yourselves, whether the son of Mary be your God and maker. If he himself have a *God and Father*, and the same God and Father with yourselves, you are brethren; and you ought no more, without an express divine authority for it, to worship him, than he ought to worship you. You are equally dependent upon the same great God and Father of all; and neither of you have any thing but what he gave, what you are alike accountable to him for, and what he can resume at his sovereign pleasure.

But I do not mean, in this address, to enter into the particulars of the argument with you, but only to exhort you, though with all possible earnestness, to enquire and judge for yourselves. And do not think yourselves unqualified to form a judgment in the case. As far as *reason* is concerned in the discussion, use your reason; where *scripture* is appealed to, consult the scriptures; and when recourse must be had to *antiquity*, carefully read the monuments of it, especially in the

writings of those who are usually called *the Fathers*, so strongly recommended to you by the Dean of Canterbury; and for this you enjoy uncommon advantages, in the noble libraries to which you have access. We dissenters have no such privileges. All the knowledge we get of this kind is the result of much trouble, and much expence.

If, not wholly relying on your own investigation, you have recourse to the assistance of others, read the publications on both sides of the question, and pay no regard to the authority of *names*, but only to the weight of *argument*.

The Dean of Canterbury, I am sorry to perceive, has only recommended such works as were professedly written in defence of the doctrine of the trinity, which is not of a piece with his usual candour and liberality. Very different from this, and certainly more worthy of a christian and protestant bishop, is the conduct of the present excellent bishop of Llandaff; who, in the *list of books* which he recommends to the students in divinity, has inserted works written for and against every doctrine of importance.

As this great question is now in the course of public discussion, between myself and the ablest writers of your own church, and you cannot be wholly unconcerned spectators, read the productions



tions of both. You may be well assured that, considering the ability of the writers in favour of the doctrine of the trinity, their number, and the zeal with which they enter into the controversy, together with the opportunities which they and their numerous friends (who will not fail to give them all the assistance in their power) have of consulting the most valuable libraries, every thing will be produced that can be favourable to their argument. If, therefore, it be possible to prove that the doctrine of the trinity is not contrary to reason, that it is agreeable to the scriptures, and that it has the countenance of primitive antiquity, it will be done.

But if, after all that can be alleged, you cannot help thinking that *three divine persons* must be *three Gods*, which our religion reprobates; that Christ is the messenger and servant of God, and not God himself; and that the great body of common christians in primitive times (the very persons for whose use the books of the New Testament were written, and who must have understood them, and the doctrine of the apostles, from whom they had their instruction) were unitarians, believing that divinity is to be ascribed to no other than to one God the Father, and that Christ was simply (Luke xxiv. 19.) *a prophet mighty in word and deed* (Acts ii. 22.) *a man approved of God, by signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, which God did by*

*him*; you must conclude that, notwithstanding the ability, learning, and integrity, of my opponents, their cause is indefensible; that the reformed church of England is idolatrous, as well as the church of Rome; and therefore that, till she be farther reformed, you ought to *come out of her, and be separate.*

You will, of course, hear many sermons, and see many treatises, against my publications in defence of the divine unity, but do me the justice to read the books and tracts which have alarmed your superiors so much. You will find them written perhaps with less ability, and less learning, than those of my antagonists, but with a sincere *love of truth*. While the controversy continues, I pledge myself to acknowledge any oversight that, in so copious an argument, I may be guilty of, and shall let nothing of any moment pass unnoticed. I am even willing to adopt any method that shall be thought, by my adversaries themselves, most to facilitate the fullest investigation of the subject. I openly call upon every one, who has any considerable character at stake, and who has entered into the lists, such as Dr. Horsley, Mr. White, Mr. Howes, and Dr. Horne, to make good what they have advanced; and in these circumstances, you cannot doubt their readiness to produce any thing in their power to confute and silence me.

Besides

Besides my larger works, as the *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, and of *Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, together with all the writings of Mr. Lindsey, permit me to recommend to your perusal, a small pamphlet entitled, *A General View of the Arguments for the Unity of God, &c.* mentioned p. 39. You will find it of great use in estimating the progress that may be made in the discussion, as it takes in the whole compass of it, from reason, from the scriptures, and from history; so that if any of my arguments be found to be defective, you will easily see how many remain unanswered, and what is their proper place, and weight, in the whole controversy.

I am, &c.



## LETTER III.

*Of the Difficulties attending an open Acknowledgment  
of Truth.*

GENTLEMEN,

I AM truly sensible of the peculiar difficulties attending your situation. Many of you, I believe, have no other prospect in life but that of officiating in a church, in which the doctrine of the trinity, to the examination of which I wish to draw your attention, is actually received. It even enters into her forms of devotion; so that for the present you have no choice but to subscribe her articles, and make use of her forms, or give up all hopes of preferment, or employment. Should you, therefore, after the examination which I now recommend, see reason (as I cannot help suspecting you will) to decline that subscription, and all your prospects in life depending upon it, you may be much embarrassed.

To this I can only say, that, great as the difficulty, no doubt, will be, it will be less *now*, than if, venturing to take a step which your minds disapprove, you should be struck with a sense of the impropriety

priety of this transaction, in a latter period of your lives; when you will be actually engaged in an employment, the duties of which you cannot conscientiously discharge, with the additional burden of a wife and family, and when it may be too late to look out for any other source of subsistence. Many worthy persons, I do assure you, are at this very time in this most painful situation, wishing it was with them as it is now with you; who clearly see what *duty* requires, and acutely feel how *nature*, and all its ties, oppose it.

Some years ago, a clergyman, then turned sixty, with a wife and a numerous family, told me his distressing case, with tears literally running down his cheeks. It was not for me to advise what I might not have been capable of doing in the same circumstances. He himself knew but too well what strict duty required. I could only mix my tears with his. For such men as these, whose complaints are only uttered in private, our present governors and their own ecclesiastical superiors, seem to have no feeling. But there is a great Being, *higher than the highest*, who knows, and who will one day visit for these things.

Strongly as you may feel your own difficulties, you cannot but be sensible how much they are exceeded by those of the case which I have now mentioned. Besides, if virtuous resolution is to be expected of man, it is to be expected of *youth*.

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That is the period of life the most distinguished for a generous ardour in the pursuit of truth, for an ingenuous disposition, unperturbed by a commerce with the world, and a vigour of mind equal to any trial. Act, then, a part becoming enlightened, virtuous, and generous British youth. Confer together, and associate in your common cause. A petition for a removal of subscription to any human articles of faith, and for a reformation of the public liturgy, or for leave to alter it with the consent of your parishioners, would, I am confident, have more weight from you, than from any other description of men in the kingdom.

Tell our governors, that you are ready to render your country the best services in your power, in promoting the knowledge and practice of christianity; but that there are obstructions in your way, which prevent your engaging in this great work, and which would defeat your purpose if you did; that you cannot, with a good grace, or with effect, inculcate the principles of honesty and integrity on others, after, by a public and solemn act, violating them yourselves; that it will be your happiness, and your glory, to teach christianity, but not the manifest abuses and corruptions of it, doctrines which militate with the fundamental principles of it; that you cannot, at the same time preach the religion of Christ, and worship another Being than him whom Christ worshipped,



shipped, and whom he taught all his disciples to worship, as *the only true God*.

Tell them that, after an alteration in the forms of public worship, you can with infinitely more advantage teach those principles which are truly great, and essential to christianity, and on which alone its efficacy to purify the heart, and to reform the life, can depend; and that, provided this great end be gained, the object of all good and wise government will be answered; for that the welfare of society, which is the sole object of civil government, cannot possibly have any necessary connexion with the mysterious doctrine of the trinity. Tell them that it is sufficient if, believing nothing but what they can understand, men be good citizens; and that this will be best effected by inculcating the great doctrine of a life of retribution after death, a state in which men will receive according to their *works*, not according to their *opinions*.

If you cannot engage a sufficient number to make a respectable application to your superiors, in church or state, still do what integrity requires of you as individuals. It is what many, to their infinite honour, have done before you. A considerable number of the most intelligent and best disposed young men have declined entering into the ministry, when they seriously reflected on the terms on which they must have done it;  
men,

men, whose ability and integrity would have qualified them to be the greatest ornaments of their profession, if the entrance into it had not been too narrow to admit them.

I cannot help flattering myself, however, that an earnest representation from even a few of you, of your peculiarly difficult situation, would not be without its effect; and then your country would be indebted to you for its emancipation from a bondage which, in consequence of the progress of religious knowledge, must be every day more severely felt, a bondage which cannot affect any but the intelligent and the ingenuous; those who wish well to the cause of *virtue*, but who cannot promote it except in the way of *truth*. In all events, however, you will have done your duty; and greater guilt will remain on those who refuse so reasonable a request.

Where religion is concerned, do not deceive yourselves by waiting till some *great man*, in the church or the state take the lead. Neither was christianity propagated, nor the reformation begun, by this means. Individuals of all ranks thought and acted for themselves, and those who had influence in public measures favoured them when it appeared to be their interest so to do. And, in the nature of things, nothing else could be expected. Persons in years, or who have establishments for life, have generally hit upon some method

method or other to make themselves easy; and wishing to continue so, they are offended at any thing that is likely to create disturbance. Thus disposed, they will never be at a loss for some plausible pretext for *putting off*, at least, every proposal of reformation. There are, however, such liberal characters on the episcopal bench at this time, that I almost persuade myself, they would countenance and assist such an application as I propose.

As to ministers of state, they must, and ought, to follow the lead of the people. Make it appear to them that the country in general wishes for a reformation, or that many earnestly desire it, and that the rest would not violently oppose it, and depend upon it *they* will not. It is our business, therefore, without troubling ourselves about the conduct of others, to look to our own, to get all the light we can ourselves, and to do every thing in our power to enlighten the minds of others; confident that the general prevalence of truth will, in due time, draw after it every thing that we can desire, with respect to *public reformation*, and *public liberty*.

With respect to the *common people* of this country, it would be doing them great injustice to consider them as trinitarians. More than nine in ten, I am pretty confident, would be better pleased with an unitarian than a trinitarian liturgy, though



they do not interest themselves so much in the affair, as to take any steps towards promoting it.

There can even be no doubt, but that the thinking part of the clergy really wish for some alteration in the articles, and the form of public worship, and that they would prefer one in which all religious worship should be confined to *one God, the Father*, could they be sure that every thing else relating to the establishment might remain unaltered. Of the learned clergy, it is almost certain that those who approve of the sentiments of Dr. Clarke, are more in number than the rigid trinitarians, who would be clamorous against any change. Were the younger clergy, therefore, and candidates for the ministry, in earnest, for a reformation, it could not, in all probability, be kept back much longer.

I am, &c.

LET-

## L E T T E R IV.

*Animadversions on Dr. Purkis's Sermon.*

GENTLEMEN,

**T**HE preceding Letters were written in consequence of reading the Dean of Canterbury's truly candid Sermons, and I was led to think of addressing myself to *you*, as well as to *him* on the occasion, on account of his being president of a college in Oxford. Since the writing of them, I have seen another *Sermon* preached by Dr. Purkis, one of the preachers of the King's Chapel, at Whitehall, before the University of Cambridge, on Commencement Sunday, July 2, 1786, which, if the writer may be credited\*, was received with

\* The doubt here intimated was occasioned by the following anonymous letter, which shows that one of our Universities, at least, is not destitute of liberality.

“ I lose no time in transmitting you a discourse which did much violence to my feelings at the time I heard it delivered, from the university pulpit. So far is the author's boast in the advertisement from being true, that I believe his sermon gave serious concern to several very respectable, learned, and liberal men among his audience (which, it being Commencement Sunday, was a very numerous one) as well as to myself. It was preached as an exercise for his doctor's degree. The publisher informs me, that the greatest part of the impression has been sent  
by

as much applause as those of the Dean of Canterbury, who is of Oxford.

Though I think such mere declamation utterly unworthy of an university that has a Newton to boast of, and do not see that it contains any thing particularly deserving of a reply, I shall take occasion from it to shew the extreme weakness of some things on which great stress is laid with respect to the discussion that is now before the public, and others of a similar nature. One would think, indeed, that such things could only be said *ad captandum vulgus*, and could never have been addressed to those who are brought up in a freedom from vulgar prejudices, which ought to be one great object in a course of *liberal education*.

### 1. *Of the Influence of Philosophy on Religion.*

Dr. Purkis preaches from Col. ii. 8. *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudi-*

by the author as presents to bishops and great men. I trust you will not be wanting to check the *poison* of its influence, to speak like the author, for which I blush, as I should at any thing that favoured of an unchristian spirit. An answer from your masterly pen, I have reason to believe, will give great satisfaction to many conscientious lovers of truth in this university, but I assure you, to none more than to your hearty well-wisher in the gospel cause, who professes, *ex animo*, to be a sincere enquirer into the *truth as it is in Jesus*."

" Cambridge, Nov. 27, 1786."

ments



*ments of this world, and not after Christ.* By this he, no doubt, meant to insinuate that myself, and other unitarians, who have some pretensions to philosophy, are just such philosophers as the apostle Paul had to do with, their principles being the same, having the same connexion with religion, the same influence upon it, and tending alike to fill the mind with pride and self-conceit. Hence the phrases, "a minute mind busied with remark-  
"ing only the track of its own experiments, p. 9,  
"a vain presuming person, ib. "dogmatical arrogance," p. 8, &c. &c. Indeed, without this construction, Dr. Purkis's text and discourse could not be thought to be peculiarly "seasonable at  
"this time," as the advertisement prefixed to it expresses.

Now really, Gentlemen, there is no foundation whatever for any of these insinuations or reflections. The philosophy which the apostle alluded to was undoubtedly that of the Gnostics, the principles of which you will see detailed in my *History of early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, and which you may find in any book of ecclesiastical history. Please then to examine them, and see whether you can find in them any resemblance to the modern *experimental philosophy*, with which (notwithstanding its supposed evil tendency) you are, I doubt not, well acquainted. The Gnostics made no experiments at all. Their notions were all metaphysical, mythological, or theological, and  
F therefore,

therefore, naturally interfered with, and contaminated, the christian principles; whereas, experimental philosophy is wholly unconnected with them, any farther than as all truth has a connexion.

Accordingly we see that there have been experimental philosophers, as well as mathematicians, of every opinion with respect to the doctrine of the trinity. If, therefore, this kind of science tends to make men *proud*, there must be proud and conceited trinitarians, as well as unitarians, and there are who think that my antagonist Dr. Horsley might be quoted as a proof of this. But, in fact, experimental philosophy tends to make us humble; as it shews in the strongest light, the immensity of nature, the unsearchable wisdom of the author of nature, and the narrowness of our comprehension. Other persons *bear* of these truths, but experimental philosophers *feel* them; and it is chiefly from their report that others derive their knowledge of them. Let Dr. Purkis also say, what experimental philosophy has to do with the *traditions of men*, or the *rudiments of the world*. — Indeed, Gentlemen, no man could know any thing of modern philosophy, or of gnosticism, and say what Dr. Purkis does on this subject. It is all groundless insinuation and calumny, void of all colour or resemblance of truth, and calculated to prejudice the mind both against philosophy, and rational theology.

There

There is more pride, Gentlemen, in disclaiming reason, and affecting to be governed by a principle superior to it, than in humbly following it. Besides, it has been well observed, that no man abandons reason till reason has abandoned him.

## 2. *Of Mysteries in Religion.*

If *mysteries* mean, as Dr. Purkis say they do, p. 10, "things in their own nature incomprehensible," I must say, that the scriptures know no such mysteries, but only things that were for some time unknown, but which were perfectly intelligible when they were made known. The term is never applied to any thing concerning *the nature of God*, but only to the dispensations of his providence, and almost wholly to that one particular in his dispensations, the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, without burdening them with the observance of the Jewish ritual. But how can this be said to be a thing "in its own nature incomprehensible?" It had been, as the apostle calls it, a *secret*, or *mystery*, *hid from ages*, but it was then *made known*, and when made known, was perfectly intelligible.

What Paul calls (1 Tim. iii. 16) *the great mystery of godliness* consisted of such particulars relating to christianity as are all perfectly intelligible, when made known, as (even admitting the common reading) *God manifest in the flesh*, that is, speak-



ing to mankind by the man Christ Jesus, &c. &c. Suffer not your minds, therefore, to be dazzled by the doctrine of mysteries in religion, and the submission of *reason* to *faith*. By the same bait you may be drawn in to believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. For the catholics use the very same arguments in its defence, that the trinitarians do in the defence of that of the trinity. They are both said to be doctrines of *pure revelation*, and that it is not the province of *reason* to examine them. In reality, they are neither agreeable to reason nor revelation.

### 3. Of Toleration.

If any subject had been well understood, I should have thought it had been that of toleration. But I perceive it is of very difficult comprehension to those who have it in their power to be intolerant. It happens to be unfashionable to deny the doctrine of it *in words*, but its *principles* are certainly undermined by the limitations of it in this Sermon of Dr. Purkis. For he would not tolerate, p. 20, "the disbelievers of the gospel," saying, p. 21, that "the religion of Jesus manifestly excludes every other; and that we must adhere to this exclusive principle, if we assert its divine authority."

This, Gentlemen, you must see to be the most palpable of all fallacies. In one sense, indeed, every truth is *exclusive*, because it cannot be received

ceived together with the opposite error, the one necessarily excluding the other; that is, in the mind of the same person. But in no other sense is the religion of Christ, any more than the principles of true philosophy, of an exclusive nature. Whereas Dr. Purkis means, that the professors of christianity ought not to suffer any other religion to be professed, if they have power to prevent it, which is a doctrine that neither Christ nor the apostles give any countenance to. *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual* (2 Cor. x. 4). If christianity itself be of this exclusive nature, the same property must belong to every thing that is essential to it; and consequently, trinitarians, thinking their peculiar doctrines essential to christianity, will think themselves justified in exterminating all unitarians, as well as Jews and Mahometans, as *disbelievers* of true christianity.

But must not Dr. Purkis allow that, if the civil governors of a country, *as such*, have a right to use their power in support of what they deem to be true religion, heathens and Mahometans have the same right to persecute christians, that christians have to persecute them? The christian maxim, of *doing to others as we would be done by ourselves*, is as justly applicable to this case as to any other whatever. If therefore we christians would think it right that we should be tolerated

among heathens or Mahometans, we ought to tolerate them among us.

4. *Of perverting the Language of the Scriptures.*

Dr. Purkis says, p. 12, "Next to this turn of philosophical system in religion, we remarked a sceptical desire of arguing away the phraseology of scripture, when it seems to convey doctrines above our comprehension, in order to reduce them to the level of our own opinions," &c. &c. &c.

Now I dare say, that Dr. Purkis, believing in the truth of the scriptures, and likewise in other truths not contained in the scriptures, will endeavour to reconcile them as well as he can, as also to reconcile one scripture truth with another; for they cannot *both* be believed, unless they can be reconciled; and what is this but the very thing that he charges the unitarians with, as an unpardonable fault? For example, he, as a protestant cannot believe that a piece of bread is changed into flesh, while the properties of bread remain in it, though our Saviour has said of the sacramental bread, *This is my body*. What then does he do, but explain away this phraseology, by supposing that it is a figurative expression, and merely because the doctrine of "*the literal sense*" is above his comprehension; and to reduce it to the level "of his own opinion." In this very language, he



he would be reprov'd for his conduct by a catholic disputant. Why then does he see a mote in my eye, and not the beam that is in his own eye?

But in reality, Gentlemen, the plain language of scripture is much more directly in favour of unitarianism than of the doctrine of the trinity; and it is with difficulty made to accord to the latter. The great doctrine of the strict *unity of God*, and also that of the *pure humanity of Christ*, is the common language of the scriptures, where no figure is used, or can be suspected. As when the apostle says (1 Tim. ii. 5) *To us there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*. By what construction of words and phrases, can the doctrine of the trinity be reconciled with this passage? Must not the literal meaning be explained away, before it can be made consistent with that mysterious doctrine?

The texts which the unitarians have to accommodate to their system are very few indeed, compared with those which the trinitarians must subject to their mode of torture.

##### 5. *Of Materialism and the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity.*

Dr. Purkis is not singular in endeavouring to throw an odium upon myself, and others, as *materialists*, as if the doctrine of an immaterial soul

was essential to christianity. I shall not argue this matter with Dr. Purkis, having already advanced all that I think necessary for the purpose in my *Disquisitions concerning Matter and Spirit*, in which I am satisfied that I have made it as evident as any thing of this nature can be, that the popular doctrine of a soul has no foundation in reason, or the scriptures, but was borrowed from the heathen philosophy. I shall now only observe to you, that the doctrine of a soul is of no consequence *in itself*, or to a *christian*, but as an argument for a future life.

If, therefore, any person does firmly believe that he shall live again, and receive according to his works, which is the great and ultimate doctrine of christianity, of what consequence is it whether he believe that he has a soul or not? It is enough that he believes that his power of thinking (which is the only province of a soul) will be restored to him at the resurrection, and that he will have a perfect recollection of all the transactions of the present life. And this I believe as firmly as any of those who hold the doctrine of a soul. In what respects then, is my faith of less value than theirs?

With as little reason do Dr. Purkis and others suppose that, by the doctrine of *philosophical necessity*, which I hold, and which I consider as even demonstrably true, "every principle," as he says,

p. 7, "of right and wrong, of moral goodness  
"and moral government, has been in reality re-  
"moved from our sight, and, of course, the ne-  
"cessity of all law and religion whatsoever."

Now, in my writings on this subject, I have proved it, and shall not take the trouble to prove any more, that the doctrine of necessity supplies the only theoretical foundation of moral government, and that the opposite doctrine affords no foundation for it at all. But independently of this, with respect to the real consequences of any doctrine, those who hold it, and not those who deny it, should be consulted. For if I myself do not perceive that such consequences flow from my system, I cannot *act* as if they did. And surely, any man who believes that his actions are truly *voluntary*, depending upon *motives*, and that he shall receive good or evil hereafter according to his works here, may be depended upon for giving due attention to his conduct, whatever be his opinion with respect to the nature of *the mind*, and the manner in which motives influence it. Can Dr. Purkis shew that necessitarians are at all less solicitous about their moral conduct than other men? This is the proper test of the moral influence of any system.

It is commonly said, that the doctrine of necessity tends to make men *indifferent to all action*, all events being pre-determined by God, and all sure  
to



to work right, and end well. But how does this supposition correspond to fact? Dr. Horne says, "our opponents," among whom he undoubtedly includes myself, "are shrewd, active, busy, and indefatigable." How far this character applies to myself, I will not say. But I will venture to assert that, change the term *shrewd* (which is always used in a bad sense) for *intelligent*, or *sensible*, and the rest of the description applies to many necessarians, and that some of the advocates for philosophical liberty are the most indolent of mankind.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER V.

*Of Mr. Jones's Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity.*

GENTLEMEN,

AS the worthy Dean of Canterbury strongly recommends to you *Mr. Jones's Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity*, proved by above a hundred short and clear arguments, expressed in the terms of the holy Scripture, compared after a manner entirely new; no doubt esteeming it to be a master-piece of reasoning, I am tempted to give you a specimen of his mode of arguing on the subject. To pur-

sue him through all his *hundred arguments* will hardly be required of me; as every text on which any things that *to other persons* has had the appearance of an argument, has been built, is satisfactorily explained in my small pamphlet, entitled, *A Familiar Illustration of particular Texts of Scripture*, and more at large in the writings of Mr. Lindsey.

The foundation of the more specious of Mr. Jones's arguments is the following: If any language be applied to God, and the same be ever applied to Christ; or if the same act should be ascribed to them both, it is with him a proof that Christ must be God; without considering that the same language, and the same actions, may be ascribed to God, and also to man, in different senses.

Thus, because we read in Is. xliii. 11. *I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no SAVIOUR*; and Christ is also called *a Saviour* (as in 2 Pet. iii. 18. *our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*) he concludes that Christ must be God, saying, p. 3, “unless he were God, even the Lord Jehovah, “as well as man, he could not be *a Saviour*, because the Lord has declared there is no Saviour “beside himself. It is therefore rightly observed “by the apostle, Phil. ii. 9. that God, in dignifying the man Christ with the name of *Jesus*, “has given him a name above every name, even “that of *a Saviour*, which is his own name, and “such as can belong to no other.”

But,

But by the very same argument, Moses, and many other persons, might be proved to be God, because they are called *saviours*, having been made *the means* of delivering the people of Israel, or others, from some of the difficulties in which they were involved, as in Neh. ix. 27. *Thou gavest them saviours who saved them, &c.* In the same sense Christ is also properly called *a Saviour*, as having been the instrument in the hand of God of saving mankind from sin, and from death, the consequence of sin; and that Christ was no more than the *instrument* in the hands of God for this end, is as evident, and as clearly expressed in the scriptures, as that Moses was his instrument in delivering the people of Israel from Egypt. They are both said to be *sent*, or commissioned, by God, for the purpose.

On the same principle Mr. Jones argues, p. 18, that because we read, John iii. 16. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son*, and Eph. v. 25. *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*, that *Christ and God must be the same*. He well observes, in his advertisement, that "his arguments are, to the best of his knowledge, most of them, *new*." Indeed, I should have thought it very extraordinary, if the comparison of these two texts had suggested the same argument to any other individual person besides himself; though when suggested by him, it may have approved itself to the better sense of the Dean of Canterbury.

In



In reply to it, it can hardly be necessary to inform you, Gentlemen, that God might love the world, and having the power to dispose of Christ as of all his other creatures, as he pleased, might *send* him, *give* him, or *appoint* him, for the purpose of saving the world from ignorance and vice; at the same time that Christ, engaging in this benevolent undertaking with the same readiness and cheerfulness with which all persons ought to obey the commands of God; and being a man himself, and, as such, having the most sincere goodwill and compassion towards his fellow men, might also *love* them, and be said to *give himself* for them. As Paul likewise, and other apostles, loved the church, and gave their lives for it, which it is evident they did, whether that particular language be ever used with respect to them in the scriptures or not, Mr. Jones might prove from this circumstance, that *they* are also each of them God, equal to the Father.

Mr. Jones even argues that Christ is of a divine nature, because, in 2 Pet. i. 4. christians are said to be *partakers of the divine nature*, and in Heb. iii. 14. they are said to be *partakers of Christ*. Therefore, says he, p. 29, "Christ is in, " or of the divine nature, the same Almighty " God and Lord who declared to Abraham, I " am thy shield, and exceeding great reward; so " that these being compared together, are decisive " for the Catholic Homoeousion doctrine, at which  
" the

“ the Arians, from the Council of Nice to this  
 “ very day, have been so grievously offended.”

Mr. Jones was not, perhaps, aware that, by this mode of reasoning, he was supplying the Roman catholics with a new argument for their doctrine of transubstantiation. But if every thing of which christians are said to be *partakers* be the same, the sacramental bread must be concluded to be Christ himself. For it is said, 1 Cor. x. 17. *We are all partakers of that one bread.*

On these principles also, the distinction in the three persons of the trinity will be confounded. For as in Heb. ii. 14. christians are said to be *partakers of Christ*; so in chap. vi. 4. they are said to be *partakers of the Holy Ghost*.

I am still more surprized that Mr. Jones should not have perceived that, according to his mode of interpretation, this text in Peter would authorize him to conclude, that all christians have a proper divine nature, or are consubstantial with the Father. For in defence of this term, which he acknowledges to be unscriptural, he says, p. 30, addressing the Arians, “ And now the scripture is before us, let me ask them a plain question or two. Is not the word *essence*, or *substance*, of the same signification with the word *nature*? And have not the Fathers of the church thus expounded it, and is not this phrase  
 “ of

"*of the same nature* as conclusive of the divinity  
"of Christ, as that other *of the same substance*?  
"Why then should that expression of the Nicene  
"creed be thought so offensive, when there is  
"another in the scripture so near of kin to it,  
"that the Arians must be sensible that they could  
"gain nothing by the exchange? For the di-  
"vine nature, we all agree, can be but one, three  
"divine natures, of course, making three differ-  
"ent Gods. But the scripture, compared as  
"above, has asserted Christ to be of this divine  
"nature."

We see here, how much it is in the power of prejudice to make men blind to the most obvious considerations. For it is remarkable that the participation of a divine nature is no where so expressly predicated of Christ, as it is by Peter, in this passage, of *all christians*: whereas, from the above quotation from Mr. Jones, the reader would have imagined that it was not to *christians*, but to *Christ* only, that this participation was attributed.

I shall conclude my animadversions on Mr. Jones's medium of proof, that God and Christ are the same being, by observing, that on the very same principle *God* and *Satan* may be proved to be the same Being; since the same action is ascribed to them both. For, in 2 Sam. i. 24. we read, *And again the anger of the Lord was kindled*  
against



*against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, go number Israel and Judah; whereas, in the parallel history, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. we read, And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

As to all the texts of scripture in which Christ is spoken of as *a man*, and consequently inferior to the Father, which are without number, Mr. Jones makes himself very easy about them, by saying, p. 23, that “in the person of Christ there  
“is a human soul and body, the nature of a man,  
“which, as it cannot lay claim to what is spoken  
“of Christ in unity with the Father, so must it  
“receive to its own account whatever seems to  
“degrade and disjoin him from the Father; so  
“that the true catholic faith, which allows him  
“to be perfect God and perfect man, is never of-  
“fended, or put to its shifts, by any thing the  
“scripture may have said about him in either  
“capacity.” Had it therefore been asserted in the most express terms, and had it been repeated ever so often, that Christ was *not God*, it would not have staggered Mr. Jones, or have put him to any shift at all; as he would instantly have replied, that the meaning was, not that the *whole person of Christ*, but only *the man*, the inferior part of him, was not God.

Surely every person must be sensible, that this is putting it absolutely out of our power to make  
any

any inference whatever from the language of scripture, and supposing that the sacred writers had recourse to the most unworthy equivocations. For, by the same rule, if any thing consists of two parts, whatever is asserted as of *the whole* may be understood of which ever *part* any person pleases. Consequently, it might be truly said of Christ, in contradiction to every thing that is most expressly related of him in the gospel history, that he was never born, that he never died, or never rose from the dead; secretly meaning, that none of these particulars could with truth be affirmed of his *divine nature*.

When Christ, in order to comfort his disciples under the idea of his departure from them, said that his Father (to whom he was going, and who as God omnipresent, would be always with them) was *greater than he*, he certainly must have intended that he was greater, not than a part of himself only, but than his whole self. His meaning was, no doubt, the same with that of other pious persons, who, on being separated from their friends by death, commonly say, that they leave them to the care of one who can do more for them than *they* could.

We have an example of the manner in which Mr. Jones applies the principle I have mentioned, in his interpretation of 1 Cor. xi. 3. *the head of Christ is God*. "The name *Christ*," he says, p. 23,  
 G "does

“ does here stand, as in other places out of number, for the man Christ. Otherwise it must follow, that as Christ is God, God is the head of himself, which is a contradiction; or that one God is the head of another God, which is also a contradiction.” But can you, Gentlemen, think that by *Christ*, in this passage, the apostle did not mean the whole of Christ, whatever his nature consisted of, and that God is not here said to be the head of, or superior to, every part of that nature? Mr. Jones might just as well have affirmed that when, in the former part of the same verse, it is said, *the head of every man is Christ*, that by *man*, is to be understood, not the whole of man, but only some part of him.

As Mr. Jones is obliged to have recourse to such a miserable abuse of language with respect to the word *Christ*, he makes no less free with the term *Father*. For, in his interpretation of 1 Cor. viii. 6. *To us there is but one God, the Father* (a text so decisively in favour of the proper unity of God, in the person of the Father only, that there was no other method of evading the force of it) he says, p. 21, “ One God the Father is here the name of a nature, under which Christ himself, as God, is also comprehended. And the same may be proved of it in several other places.” Mr. Jones certainly was not aware of it, but this kind of reasoning is even subversive of the doctrine of the trinity itself. For if the term *Father*



comprehend all the persons of the trinity; it must be synonymous to the term *God*, and no proof will remain of the existence of such a person as that of the *Father*; so that the *trinity* will be reduced to *two persons*, viz. the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And if his reasoning from the phrase *partaking of the divine nature*, be admitted, these two will be farther reduced to one, viz. the Son, who will then, indeed, be *the one God over all*.

On this principle also we must suppose, that when Christ prayed to the Father, as *the one true God*, John xvii. 3. he did not address himself to the person of the Father, as any common reader would imagine, but to the *divine nature* in general; and therefore that his prayer was as much directed to himself, as to the Father. Besides, if Mr. Jones be sufficiently authorized to consider the term *Father* as expressive of the *divine nature* in general, why may we not be at liberty to use the term *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, in the same latitude. And if each of them denote the whole of the divine nature, the unity of God will be completely established; as we shall then have three different names for the same thing, which will be what is commonly called *Sabellianism*; according to which the Father, who sent the Son, was himself the Son that was sent, who was born, and who died.

It is surely sufficient to point out these specimens of Mr. Jones's book, which contains nothing

thing better, to shew you what you have to expect from the whole. But I sincerely join with the Dean of Canterbury in recommending the whole of it to your careful perusal, thinking such a defence of the doctrine of the trinity to be the best refutation of it; strongly exemplifying, as it does, the wretched shifts men are reduced to, when their tenets are repugnant to common sense, and contradicted by the plain and uniform language of scripture. Mr. Jones seems to pride himself in having mustered up "*a hundred arguments*, most of them *new*; but he might easily have made them a thousand, and from the manner in which they might be laid down, as likely to be *convincing*. Mr. Jones, however, should consider, that the strength of an army depends not on the number of sick and wounded, but only on that of the *effective men* in it.

Since I wrote the preceding Letters to the Dean of Canterbury, I have seen the small pamphlet so strongly recommended by him. It is entitled, *A Preservative against the Publications dispersed by modern Socinians, in which the Impiety and Absurdity of their Principles are clearly shewn*. This *Preservative*, &c. contains little more than, vehement exclamation against *wolves in sheep's cloathing*, &c. representing the Socinians in the worst light, as enemies to the gospel, to God, and to their country; whose doctrines cannot fail to bring the judgments of God upon us all.

As

As a specimen of the sentiments, and manner, of this piece, I shall only select the following paragraph, from p. 16 ; “ I do not know how the wit  
 “ of man, when it has got this new religion, can  
 “ put it into a creed. You cannot begin in the  
 “ common form, I believe, &c. You must say,  
 “ I do not believe—that any thing more than the  
 “ religion of human reason is necessary to pro-  
 “ fessors of christianity. I have no need of faith.  
 “ I want not the grace of God. I need not be  
 “ called, nor elected, by the divine favour, &c.”

“ I remember, when I was a country school-  
 “ boy, I used to hear my companions talk of  
 “ raising the devil by saying the creed backwards,  
 “ Such a confession as this we have now before  
 “ us seems better calculated to answer that pur-  
 “ pose, and is certainly fitter for a necromancer,  
 “ than a professor of christianity. Yet this is the  
 “ favourite object, for the interests of which a  
 “ clamorous party assembled, contributed, peti-  
 “ tioned, and blotted tons of paper. For this an  
 “ unhappy gentleman” (meaning the excellent  
 Mr. Lindsey) “ left his ministry in the church of  
 “ England, to preach up the God of Mahome-  
 “ tans in a chamber, and calls this *confessing Christ*  
 “ *before men*. For this their pamphlets are dis-  
 “ persed by thousands, to turn the affections of  
 “ the ignorant from the inestimable truths of the  
 “ gospel, and inflame their fancies with a set of  
 G 3 “ opinions,



"opinions, which can only lead them to perdition," &c. &c. &c.

Surely, Gentlemen, I do not need to copy any more of such a pamphlet as this, and much less to reply to it. What must that cause be which requires such wretched misrepresentation of the principles and conduct of serious men, and such indecent and profane drollery to support it. I should not have thought it worth while to notice such publications as either of these of Mr. Jones (for this pamphlet is also ascribed to him) had they not been so earnestly recommended by so truly respectable a writer as the Dean of Canterbury. I am also informed that *Mr. Jones's Catholic Doctrine* was recommended, as a work of consequence, to the University of Oxford by their Professor of Divinity, Dr. Bentham, who preceded Dr. Randolph. I seriously hope that Dr. Horne himself will produce something much superior to the publications he so lavishly commends. If not, this controversy is already at an end.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

# LETTERS

TO THE

REV. DR. PRICE.

——— In hac re scilicet una  
Multum diffimiles ; at cætera pene gemelli,  
Fraternis animis.

HORACE.

L E T T E R S

R E V. D R. P. R. I. C E



# LETTERS

TO THE

REV. DR. PRICE.

## LETTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

DEAR FRIEND,

**W**ITHOUT any view to engaging you in a controversy, which you have expressed a fixed resolution to decline, but merely from the satisfaction I feel in addressing myself to a person for whom I entertain the highest degree of esteem, and even veneration, and whose candour exceeds that of almost every other man, I chuse to throw a few remarks upon your late *Sermons* into the form of *Letters to yourself*. A great part of the satisfaction I enjoy in this life, and especially that valuable portion of it, which arises from my ardour (if I have any) in the pursuit

purſuit of truth, I owe to my intercourſe with you; an intercourſe, and friendſhip, which has now been of long ſtanding, and which, if it be not my own fault, will never, I am perſuaded, have any conſiderable interruption; but, after being the ſource of much happineſs to me here, will continue to be ſo for ever.

Your diffidence with reſpect to concluſions, which you have formed with the greateſt care, and after the moſt deliberate enquiry, I even think exceſſive; and it is the only thing with reſpect to which, I cannot ſay that I wiſh to reſemble you. For I would not loſe the ſatiſfaction that ariſes from a perſuaſion of having found any valuable truth, nor willingly continue longer than is neceſſary, in a ſtate of *doubt*, than which nothing is more painful and diſtreſſing. Whether I have been too precipitate in forming my own judgment, eſpecially with reſpect to the important queſtion that will be the ſubject of theſe Letters, is not for myſelf to determine. The time is faſt approaching, with reſpect to both of us, when all uncertainty about it will be at an end; and when the ſource of our error, on which ever ſide it lies, will be laid open to us; and ſo as perhaps may be of ſome uſe to us in our farther progreſs in the purſuit of truth. In the mean time, the candour you expreſs on the ſubject, cannot but give me the greateſt ſatiſfaction. Speaking of the Socinian ſcheme, you ſay, p. 72, “ It maintains all that we  
“ need

“ need be anxious about in christianity, and con-  
“ frequently the prejudices against it have no just  
“ foundation.”

With that candour and diffidence which distinguish all your writings, and to which all your friends are witnesses in your daily conversation, you say, with respect to the doctrine concerning the person of Christ, p. 158, “ I can in this instance, as in most others, with much more confidence say what is *not*, than what *is* the truth. The Athanasian and Calvinistic schemes of christianity, I reject with strong conviction. The Socinian scheme also, on the two points which chiefly distinguish it, I find myself incapable of receiving.” Now since you cannot say that there are more than *three* opinions on the subject, and *two* of them are absolutely inadmissible by you, I should think that nothing could prevent you embracing *the third* with the greatest confidence and satisfaction. Such, at least, would be my own feelings in your circumstances, and such they are with respect to the conclusions which I draw from similar premises.

Your indifference about making proselytes is perfectly agreeable to your usual candour; but this also I think excessive. “ I feel, you say, p. 158,  
“ no disposition to be very anxious about bringing  
“ you over to my opinion. The rage for proselytism is one of the curses of the world. I wish  
“ to



“ to make no profelytes except to candour, and  
 “ charity, and honest enquiry.”

If it be in the power of either precept or example to make such profelytes as *these*, you, Sir, cannot fail to have many; but in this case, I must think that you exceed the just bounds of moderation. Our zeal to make profelytes ought, certainly, to be in proportion to our ideas of the importance of the truth for which we are advocates; and it is evident that, notwithstanding your amiable candour with respect to us *Socinians*, or as we rather choose to call ourselves *unitarians*, you think (but how consistently with what I have quoted above you ought to have considered) our tenets to be of dangerous consequence if christianity itself be of any value. For you say, p. 146, “ It appears to me that the doctrine of  
 “ Christ’s simple humanity, when viewed in con-  
 “ nexion with the scripture account of his exalta-  
 “ tion, implies an inconsistency, and improba-  
 “ bility, which falls little short of an impossibility;  
 “ and consequently that this doctrine not only  
 “ renders the scriptures unintelligible, but christia-  
 “ nity itself incredible.”

If therefore, christianity, and the belief of it, be of any importance, as no doubt you think them to be, you ought to wish, and endeavour, to make profelytes to that view of it, according to which alone you think it to be credible. I write so much

as I do in defence of the opinion which you so strongly reprobate, because I see it in a very different light; not indeed as the only view in which christianity is credible (for I was a firm believer in it when I was an Arian, and even when I was an Athanasian) but as that according to which it is by far the *most* credible. I now think the Athanasian doctrine to imply a direct contradiction, and the Arian hypothesis to be so improbable, as that it must greatly impede the reception of christianity, especially with philosophical unbelievers. I profess to write with no other view than to make proselytes; nor indeed do I see that there can be any other rational object in writing at all.

With the greatest respect and affection,

I am, dear Friend,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,  
MARCH 1, 1787.

## LETTER II.

*Of the Nature, and antecedent Probability, of the Arian Hypothesis, with the Causes of Attachment to it.*

DEAR FRIEND,

**B**EFORE I consider any of the *arguments* that you have produced in support of your hypothesis, I must take the liberty to consider what *it is*, and make some observations respecting its *antecedent probability*. For to this must correspond the number and weight of the arguments that are necessary to support it. The Arianism that you maintain is not that of Dr. Clarke, but of a much lower kind. For you give it as your opinion, p. 95, that “by Christ God made this world only, with “its connexions and dependencies. Those learned “men, therefore,” you say, p. 96, “seem to me to “have gone too far, who speak of him as a being “who existed before all worlds, and as at the head “of all worlds. This seems almost as little warranted by reason and scripture as the doctrine “which makes him the *one supreme*; and it makes “the doctrine of his having humbled himself to “a death, even the death of the cross, to save this “world, almost equally incredible.”

But



But whether we attend to the *words of scripture*, which lead you to conclude that Christ made *this world*, or whether we attend to the necessary *connexions* and *dependencies* of this world, which you justly suppose to have had the same maker with it, it appears to me that we cannot help concluding, that if Christ made this world, he must also have made the sun, moon, and stars, and consequently all worlds. For the apostle says (Col. i. 16) *by him were ALL things created, visible and invisible* and certainly there are not more *conspicuous* objects in nature than the sun, moon, and stars. If, therefore, the apostle included in his idea of *things visible*, the earth on which we live, he could not have excluded those heavenly bodies, which are equally *visible*. Besides, what can be more express and definite in this respect, than that which John says of the *logos*, which you suppose to be the same with Christ, John i. 3. *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

You say, p. 143, “ This earth, with its inhabitants and connexions, includes all of nature that we have any concern with. — This observation is applicable to the account of the creation in the first chapter of Genesis; that account most probably, being an account only of the creation of this earth, with its immediate dependencies.” But in that account, the most express mention is made of the creation of the sun,  
moon,

moon, and stars. Indeed, if we consider the *connexions* and *dependencies* of the earth, which you suppose to have been made by Christ, we must admit that the *moon*, at least, was also made by him, on account of its intimate connexion with, and dependence upon the earth; and if the moon, surely the *sun* also, on which they both depend for light and heat; and if the sun, the whole of the planetary system, including the newly discovered *Georgium Sidus*, and all the *comets*, which belong to the sun. And if the sun, with all that is connected with it, and depends upon it, was created by Christ, why should we not suppose that he made all that cluster, or *system of stars*, of which our sun is one; and if those stars, all the habitable worlds belonging to them.

In this manner I do not see how we can consistently stop, till we include the whole universe, be the extent of it ever so great, or even infinite. So great is the *uniformity* in the system of nature, that we must pronounce it to be *one work*, and of course conclude that the author of it is *one*. This indeed, is the proper argument for the unity of God on the light of nature, and this argument respects the immediate maker of the world, whoever that Being be.

Though you think that all the ancient Arians, and Dr. Clarke and others among the moderns, made too much of the rank that Christ holds in the

the creation, when they supposed him to have existed *before all worlds*, and to be *at the head of all worlds*; you do not seem to agree with those of the modern Arians, who maintain that, on his incarnation, he was divested of all that power by which he made and governed the world. For you make his *wisdom*, and his *miracles*, to be proofs of his superior nature, which was also one of the arguments of the primitive Fathers.

I cannot say but I wish you had been a little more explicit in giving us your sentiments on this subject. For whether he was thus divested, or not, is a question that must be decided one way or the other; and to me it appears that you have only the choice of *Scylla* or *Charybdis*. If you say, as the Arians in general now do, that while Christ was on earth, he was divested of all his former power, it will follow that, in the interval between his incarnation and resurrection, the whole system of the government of the world was changed; and besides, it will not be easy to conceive how, being reduced to the condition of a mere man, he could do any thing more than another mere man might have done.

On the other hand, if, as you seem to suppose, Christ retained all his original power, and by that power worked miracles, and raised himself from the dead, his humiliation, and especially his ex-

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treme



treme dejection of mind during his agony in the garden, will be thought to be as extraordinary. For who can suppose that he who was at that very time *supporting all things by the word of his power*, could not support himself, but needed the support of an angel, an angel that (as pertaining to this world) he himself had made, and was then supporting?

These things may not be properly *contradictions*, but they are things at which my mind revolts with no less force; so that I cannot help thinking, that it is for want of giving due attention to them, that the minds of all men do not equally revolt at them.

That *mere divines* should talk so lightly as they sometimes do concerning *creation*, and the possibility of its falling within the province of an inferior Being, I do not wonder; because they have no proper idea of what creation is, or implies. They have no conception of the magnitude of it, or of the wonderful extent of the laws by which the mundane system is governed. But you, Sir, are not a mere divine. You rank high in the class of mathematicians, and natural philosophers, who are daily contemplating, and making farther enquiries into, the laws of nature; who are filled with astonishment at what they do see of them, and who are at the same time well satisfied,  
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that

that all they see bears no sensible proportion to that which is unknown.

Now, that a being possessing the profound wisdom, and astonishing power, that must have been necessary to the construction of such a system as this (even allowing the *matter* out of which it was made to have been prepared for him) should become a child in the womb of a woman, be born, be brought up from infancy to manhood, be subject to all the pains and infirmities of men\*, be delivered into the hands of his enemies, be crucified, and die, appears to me to be, in reality, no less incredible, than it does to you that the Creator of *all* worlds should be so degraded.

For between that power which is equal to the construction of such a world as this, *with all its connexions and dependencies*, and that power which is equal to the formation of *all* worlds, we are not able to perceive any real difference. With respect to *our comprehension*, that difference must be merely nominal. The less is, to our perception, *infinite*; and after that, if we say that the other is *infinito* — *infinite*, the *idea* is the same; as in our ideas, an eternity *a parte post* makes no addition to

\* I do not say *other men*, for such a being as this, however degraded, would never be called *a man*, by any person who was acquainted with his natural rank.

the idea of an eternity *a parte ante*. Each of them exceeds any definite quantity, how great so ever.

That you, Sir, therefore, who enter into these ideas much more readily than I can pretend to do, should so easily admit that of so great a degradation of your maker, and for a purpose for which, as you must allow, it is impossible for us to conceive that it should be necessary, really astonishes me. And yet you are no less astonished that I should not adopt your views of this subject. Our readers must decide between us, and as to ourselves, our mutual wonder will only produce a friendly smile.

Your attachment to the Arian hypothesis is evidently owing, in a great measure, to your supposing it to have valuable *practical uses*. You admire the condescension of so great a Being, as the maker of the world, and of all its dependencies, in becoming man, suffering, and dying for us. "I often," you say, p. 155, "feel myself deeply impressed by this consideration." This I cannot call in question. But many pious trinitarians are, I doubt not, more deeply impressed with the consideration of the supreme God becoming man, and then suffering and dying for us; and the consideration of Dr. Clarke's logos (before whom your diminutive logos shrinks into nothing) the great created Being who existed from all eternity,



nity, and who created not only this world, but all worlds, would no doubt impress *his* mind more forcibly, and more favourably than your doctrine can impress yours\*.

There is not, indeed, any doctrine in the Calvinistic, or the popish system, but what the advocates for them will maintain to have excellent practical uses. With what unspeakable reverence and devotion do the catholics eat their maker. But is this any reason why we protestants should embrace their opinions?

We find sufficient sources of gratitude and devotion in a purer system of christianity, and so shall we do in passing from trinitarianism to high Arianism, from this to your low Arianism, and from this to Socinianism, even of the lowest kind, in which Christ is considered as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses, or any other prophet. I have myself gone through all these changes, and I think I may assure you, that you have nothing to apprehend from any part of the progress.

\* "On other accounts, it [viz. the example of Christ] is more forcible in proportion to his superiority; and this is true in particular of his condescension, humility, meekness, and patience under sufferings. The greater he was, the more we are obliged to admire these virtues in him, and the more we must be excited to practice them." — P. 153.

In every stage of it you have that consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude and obedience, viz. the love of God, the almighty parent, in giving his son to die for us. And whether this son be man, angel, or of a superangelic nature, every thing that he has done is to be referred to the *love of God*, the original author of all, and to him all our gratitude and obedience is ultimately due.

Far would I be from detracting from the merit of Christ, or the value of his example, which I would endeavour to keep in view. But, as a veneration for him should be checked when it would lead us to ascribe to him *divine honours*; so, in any other respect, should we be careful how we give to him any part of that *glory which his God and Father will not give to another*.

Now Arians, besides placing Christ in a department which belongs to God only, when they make him the creator of the world, ascribe too much to him, when they suppose, or seem to suppose, that it was in consequence of his *own proposal*, that he became incarnate, and undertook the scheme of our redemption. You, Sir, have not asserted this. But what you say on the subject, has little force on any other idea. Having spoken of the "pristine dignity," of Christ, p. 153, and  
of

of his "degrading himself to the condition of a  
"mortal man," you say, "This is an instance of  
"benevolence to which we can conceive no pa-  
"rallel. This is probably the admiration of an-  
"gels, &c."

Whatever might be the degradation of this exalted Being, if it was done at the express command of God, which he must have been sensible he had no right, or power, to disobey, there could be no greater merit in it, than in the obedience of a man to the known command of the same Lord of all. To do this readily, and chearfully, is all the merit that created beings can pretend to.

Our Saviour's own language never gives us any idea of his services to mankind, but as what he undertook in consequence of the command of God; as John vii. 28. *Then cried Jesus in the temple, as he taught, saying, ye both know me, and ye know whence I am, and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not.* Such is the uniform language of our Saviour, whenever he speaks of his mission; and it suggests no other idea than that of any prophet having received a commission from God, and chearfully undertaking the execution of it.

In the idea of the merit of Christ's incarnation, as well as in other respects, there is too much of the proper trinitarian doctrine in the



scheme of Arianism, which rose after it, and out of it. In ancient Arianism there was no difference in the two systems but that between a *created* and an *uncreated* *logos*. The *office* assigned to them was the very same. Modern Arians are by degrees dropping many articles in the ancient Arian creed; but it appears to me that, in doing this, they make a scheme much less consistent with itself, with reason, or with the scriptures.

I am, &c.

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### LETTER III.

*Of the Creation of Matter by the Father, and the Formation of it by the Son, and other Considerations attending the Idea of a finite and imperfect Creator,*

DEAR FRIEND,

IT is another part of your hypothesis, that *creation out of nothing* is the prerogative of the Supreme Being, and that Christ only employed the matter, which he found already produced, in the construction of the world. "The formation of this world by Christ does not," you say, p. 144, "imply *creation from nothing*; that probably be-  
ing

“ing peculiar to almighty power, but only the  
“arrangement of things into their present order,  
“and the establishment of this course of nature  
“to which we are witnesses.”

Now I do not see why we should distinguish the provinces of the *created creator*, and of the *un-created creator* in this manner. What could *matter* be when it was first produced out of nothing? If it had the necessary properties of matter, you must suppose it to have been *extended* and *impenetrable*. For you will say that without these properties matter would be nothing at all; and if it had impenetrability, it must have had a firm cohesion of its parts, which implies a power of *attraction* in the particles of which it consists; and if this fresh created matter did not immediately coalesce into one mass, or if there were any *pores* in it, the particles of it must have been endued with a *repulsive*, as well as an *attractive* power.

Again, if matter, as first produced, had necessarily the powers of attraction and repulsion, why not all that variety of attractions and repulsions which constitute all the different kinds of bodies? But if simple attraction and repulsion only be admitted, we must admit some *form* and *arrangement*, and therefore we cannot confine the exertions of the Supreme Being to the mere creation of matter.

Besides,

Besides, can any reason be imagined why the same great Being, who with infinite ease produced matter itself, should not, with the same ease, have produced it with all that *variety*, and all that *arrangement*, which constitute the visible system of the universe? The whole must have been equally easy to almighty power; and the uniformity of the system would certainly be better secured in this manner, than by committing it to the discretion, and consequently to the indiscretion, of inferior, and therefore imperfect agents. To me, I own there appears something so strange in the supposition of the Supreme Being having created *mere matter*, and of Christ having made this mere matter into a world, or worlds; it is so destitute of all probability either from appearances in nature, or the language of scripture, that I can hardly think it deserves a serious refutation.

As to the language of *the scriptures*, it seems to me to be absolutely inconsistent with this hypothesis. According to Moses, the same great Being who made the heavens and the earth, made also the *light*, separated the waters from the earth, and made all the plants and animals with which they are both furnished; and no mention is made of any other Being concerned in the production of any thing, or in the government of the world, when it was made.

According



According to your hypothesis, the Supreme Being made nothing more than the *earth*, or *dust of the ground*, as it is called (if his province extended even so far as that) but the person who actually formed *man*, and who made the difference of sexes, was Christ. But how does this agree with what Christ himself says, Mark x. 6. *From the beginning of the creation God made them, male and female.* You do not suppose that by the term *God*, he here meant himself; nor will you say, with Chrysostom, that Christ did not chuse to intimate that himself was the maker of man, lest it should give offence to the Jews. You must, therefore, admit, that the Supreme Being is here spoken of as the maker of the human race; and similar to this is the uniform language of scripture, so that nothing can authorize us to depart from the plain sense of it.

The Psalmist had no idea of any intermediate governor of the world when he said (Ps. civ. 21) *The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God*; or our Saviour, when he said (Matt. vi. 26) *Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.*

There is another puzzling circumstance attending your hypothesis of a proper *creation* by the Father, and of the *formation* of things only by the Son, which is that part of the scheme  
which

which relates to *spirit*. For besides *material substance*, of which the earth, &c. consists, you suppose that there is also a derived *immaterial substance*. Was this, as well as the former, *created* by the almighty power of the Father, and afterwards *formed* into angels, and the souls of men, by Christ? This is a question that arises from your general hypothesis, which requires to be considered; and the discussion of which may occasion some embarrassment to your scheme.

If the instrumentality of Christ in making the world was of the same nature with that by which he raised the dead, and worked his other miracles (as to which we are assured, that not himself, but *the Father within him, did the works*) there could be no occasion for a Being of power superior even to that of man. In this sense Adam, immediately after being created himself, might have been as good a creator as either your logos, or that of Dr. Clarke. But then this would be no proper instrumentality at all.

This kind of an intermediate creator cannot, therefore, be supposed. He must have had powers equal to the work, and if, as you justly observe, all finite Beings attain perfection by degrees\*, the maker of this world must first have

\* "Do not all beings rise gradually, one acquisition laying the foundation of another, and preparing the way for higher acquisitions?" p. 147.

produced something less perfect. But what evidence is there of the existence of any such less perfect production? Shall we look for this first *essay at creation* in a state of the earth prior to that of which Moses gives us an account? And when this earth shall be destroyed, will the maker of it be so far improved by experience, as to be able to new model it into a better form, so that the evils which, through want of skill in the creator, could not be excluded at present, will be excluded hereafter.

But though this *finite creator* should be ever so much improved by observation and experience, still his work, being the production of an *imperfect being*, must be imperfect; and while the reign of Christ continues, we can never hope to be under the conduct of a Being of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, as long as we exist.

Is it possible that such a notion as this, perfectly consonant to the Arian hypothesis, should be contemplated with pleasure? It gives me unspeakably more satisfaction to consider the present system as the best possible; being the immediate production of a Being of infinite wisdom, and that even the *evils* of which we complain are necessary parts of this best possible constitution of things.

I am, &c.



## LETTER IV.

*Considerations relating to the Origin and History of the Arian Doctrine. Of Christ not being the Object of Prayer, and of the Claim of Arians to the Appellation of Unitarians.*

DEAR FRIEND,

YOU cannot say that Christ himself ever dropped any hint that he was either the maker, or the governor of the world; and, as I have argued at large, in my controversy with Dr. Horsley, and in my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, if the apostles had, at any time, been informed of the truth of a doctrine, which they could never have learned from the scriptures of the Old Testament (in which nothing is said of *the Messiah* being the maker of the world) a doctrine of which they could have had no suspicion from any thing that they observed while they lived and conversed with Christ, we must have perceived some traces of it in their history. It was a *new idea*, and of such great magnitude, and so distinguishingly honourable to their master, compared with Moses, or any of the preceding prophets, as must have excited the greatest astonishment in both the friends and enemies of christianity.

It

It was an opinion at which the minds of all Jews must have exceedingly revolted, and therefore would have required to have been largely insisted upon, and copiously defended, even much more than the doctrine of the admission of gentile converts into the christian church, without conformity to the institutions of Moses; so that we should not have been left, as we now are, to infer this extraordinary doctrine from two or three expressions in casual epistles.

I have also shewn that the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ, how incredible soever you may think it makes the gospel to be, was that alone which was received by the great body of the primitive christians, both Jews and Gentiles. They were in possession of the books of the New Testament, and for their use they were written, and yet they saw in them no such doctrine as that of the creation of the world by Christ, or even that of his pre-existence. I have also proved (as I must be allowed to say till I see it disproved) that the doctrine of the world being made by a created Being was (if we except the Gnostics) absolutely unknown in the christian church till the time of Arius. Also, the acknowledgments of Athanasius, and of all the orthodox Fathers of the church, imply nothing less than the general prevalence of the doctrine of the *simple humanity* of Christ, and by no means that of his pre-existence, or superangelic nature. How then can that be received

ceived as the doctrine of the scriptures, which was never understood to be so, for so long a period?

I have likewise shewn that, till the same period, all the learned christians supposed that Christ had a proper *human soul*, besides the *logos* that was united to him, and that this *logos* (by which they supposed the world to have been made) had been an essential attribute of God the Father, a system fundamentally different from that of Arianism. It must therefore require the most express evidence from the scriptures, to prove *from them* the truth of a doctrine unsupported by any appearance in nature, and that was not discovered to be contained in the scriptures of the Old or New Testament, till three hundred years after Christ.

Another part of the ancient Arian hypothesis, viz. that of Christ having been the person by whom the supreme God had intercourse with the Patriarchs, you disclaim; justly thinking it to be expressly contradicted in the first verse of the epistle to the Hebrews. But the separation of two such old and intimate friends, as this opinion, and that of Christ having made the world, is, I think, not a little hazardous with respect to them both. And surely it might naturally be expected, that if Christ be that Being who made the world, who, of course, supported it by his power, and who



at length became incarnate in it, and died for it, he would be the proper medium of all the divine intercourse with it. Can it be supposed that the maker of men had nothing to do with them from their creation to the time of their redemption?

You also reject another part of the ancient Arian hypothesis concerning Christ, viz. that he is the proper object of prayer. And yet it is so natural that the maker and preserver of men, and of the world, should be the object of prayer, that, in my opinion, nothing could have prevented the practice, but some very express prohibition to worship him, which we nowhere find in the scriptures. It is only the idea of Christ not being present with us, together with its not being in his power to help us, that can make him, or any other Being, not to be the proper object of prayer to us. For there cannot be any thing unreasonable in our asking of any Being a favour which it is in his power to grant, provided he be accessible to us.

You say of the Father, p. 97, "There is no other Being concerning whom we have sufficient reason to think that he is continually present with us, and a witness to all our thoughts and desires. There is, *therefore*, no other Being to whom our prayers ought to be directed." But surely the Being who made, and who preserves us, he *in whom all things consist*, whether

he be finite or infinite, must always be present with us, and must have it in his power to grant all the petitions that we ever address to God.

It is simply under the character of God being *the Lord our maker*, that the scriptures teach us to *worship and bow down* before him. Whatever Being, therefore, comes under the description of *the Lord our maker*, we are authorized to worship and bow down to him; and as, according to you, Christ is that Being, you must be abundantly justified in making him the object of your prayers. To be the Lord our maker, and the object of prayer, are so naturally and necessarily connected, that if, by any argument whatever, it can be proved that Christ is either not the one, or not the other, it must follow that he cannot be either of them.

Moreover, all the ancient Arians allowed Christ the appellation of *God*, and indeed you do the same, when you apply to him what is said of the *logos* in the introduction to the gospel of John. For that *logos* is expressly said to be *God*, and has the attributes of the God described by Moses, viz. *the maker of all things that are made*. It is, therefore, no such God, as Moses himself is called with respect to Pharoah, or as any magistrate may be called. You make him to be a God both in *name*, and in *power*. It appears to me, therefore, not a little extraordinary, that you should claim  
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the title of *unitarians*; when all that you can with propriety say is, that, though you acknowledge *two Gods*, one of them only is the object of prayer, and to be worshipped, and the other, though your maker, and constant preserver, yet, for some unknown reason, is not the object of prayer, and not to be worshipped.

Your definition of the word *unitarian*, Note, p. 69, appears to me to be quite arbitrary, and unnecessarily complex: "By unitarians," you say, "I mean those christians who believe there is but one God, and one object of religious worship; and that this one God is the Father only, and not a trinity, consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. An unitarian, therefore," you add, "may, or may not, be a believer in Christ's pre-existence."

But I should think that the only natural and simple definition of an *unitarian* should be, a *believer in one God*, or one person, properly entitled to the appellation of God, whether he was an object of religious worship, or not; which is another and independent circumstance. If a person not concerned in this controversy were asked to give his opinion, I should imagine that, if he made any addition to this definition, he would say, that an unitarian was a believer in *one God*, or *one Being concerned in the creation and care of the world*. And



even this is rising higher in the definition of the powers of *godhead* than the ancient heathens, who were properly and professedly polytheists, ever did.

You say, that "an unitarian may, or may not be a believer in Christ's pre-existence," and very justly, if you mean that he pre-existed as an angel, or arch-angel, and if you can assign him any department similar to theirs. But I really cannot help considering Arians as believing in *two Gods*, while they hold that Christ, though a created Being himself, had for his department the formation of this world, the adjustment of all the laws to which it is subject, and of course the constant care and government of the whole, *supporting it by the word of his power*. And that the great Being to whom this description belongs should not be the object of prayer, is to me incomprehensible. If I thought there really was any such derived Being, always present with me, who planned all the events of my life, and whose power continually supported me, I could hardly resist the impulse to pray to him.

Lastly, if according to your definition, the one God must be *the Father only*, and they are not *unitarians* who do not make him the sole object of religious worship; how will you class the Moravians, who address no prayers to him, but to the Son only? Will you say that they are worship-

pers of no God at all? They might even become Arians, and continue their practice of praying to Christ only. All the ancient Arians prayed to him.

I am, &c.

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L E T T E R V.

*Of the proof from the Scriptures of the Creation of the World by Christ.*

DEAR FRIEND,

SURELY such an hypothesis as yours, viz. that of a great pre-existent created Being, *the creator of this world, with all its connexions and dependencies*, and yet not the object of prayer; a Being which, it must be acknowledged, no appearance in nature would ever have suggested to us, of which we have no account in any part of the Old Testament (though we are there informed concerning the creation of all things) an hypothesis which was unknown to all christians, learned and unlearned, till the time of Arius, requires some very satisfactory evidence; and if all the proofs be from *scripture*, those proofs ought to be very *numerous*, as well as very *clear*. You ought also to be able to give some good reason why the

scriptures were not *understood* to teach this extraordinary doctrine for so many centuries, by those who must have been the best acquainted with the language in which they are written.

Now there are not, in reality, more than two passages, in which Christ is, in any sense, said to have *created* any thing, and these are not in any *historical work*, but only incidental expressions in the epistles of Paul, viz. Eph. iii. 9. *who created all things by Jesus Christ*, and here the words *by Jesus Christ* are, with great probability thought to be an interpolation, and Col. viii. 16. *by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth; visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist; and he is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.*

As to the introduction to the gospel of John, it is not there said that any thing was made by *Christ*, but only by the *logos*, which we maintain to be *the word, or power of God*, which, as it were, resided in Christ, to which he ascribed all the  
 1 miracles



miracles that he wrought, and which there can be no doubt *did* make all things. In Heb. i. 2. it is not said that *the worlds*, but that *the ages* were made by Christ; so that something must be meant by the phrase very different from proper *creation*.

Without entering into a large examination of the two passages above-mentioned, in which *creation*, in some sense or other, is ascribed to Christ, I would only observe that neither the earth, nor the sun, moon, or stars, nor any material substance, is specified among the things created by him. In the former it is *all things*, in general, which is quite indefinite; and in the latter, in which the things created by him are enumerated, we only find *thrones, dominions, &c.* by the creation of which may be intended some exercise of that *power*, and authority, which was given to Christ after his resurrection.

That this was the whole meaning of the apostle is pretty evident from two circumstances; first, that this enumeration of things created by him, and consisting in him, closes with the mention of his being the *head of the body the church*, as if that was intended to comprehend all the preceding particulars. Secondly, as in the former part of the passage, all things that are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, are said to be *created* by Christ, in the latter part of it all things in heaven and in earth, are said to be *reconciled* by him; so that those two expressions *created* and *reconciled*, may

well be supposed to be synonymous to each other, and to be descriptive of the *new creation*, or *renovation* of the world by christianity. And this is the more probable, from the apostle's enlarging on this idea in the verses immediately following those quoted above, *And you, that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your minds, by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, &c.*

Had the term *creation* never been applied in the scriptures to any thing but the creation of material things, there would have been some plausibility in your argument from these two texts. But you know it is very usual with the sacred writers to describe the *renovation* of things by this term, and especially that great and happy change in the system of human affairs which was brought about by the gospel. This use of the term *creation* in the New Testament seems to have been borrowed from the same use of it in the Old, and especially in Is. lxxv. 17. *For behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad, and rejoice forever in that which I create. For behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.* In this figurative language, it is evident, that the prophet describes the new and happy state of things, which is to take place *in the latter days*, when the Jews will be restored to their own country, and Jerusalem, here said to be *created*, will be *rebuilt*, with great splendor.

Their

There is a variety of passages in which the term *creation* is evidently used in this secondary sense in the New Testament, as 2 Cor. v. 17. *If any one be in Christ he is a new creature.* Gal. vi. 15. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.* Eph. ii. 10. *We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*

The very same word which is used when things are said to be *created* by Christ, is even applied to human institutions; as in 1 Pet. ii. 3. *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man* (*πασιν ἀνθρωπίνῃς ἀρχαῖς*) *every creation of man*; and it is remarkable that the creation which is ascribed to Christ in the Epistle to the Colossians, is of the same nature with this which is here ascribed to men, viz. that of *dominions, principalities, and powers.*

Now since it is most evident that the term *creation* is used in two senses, the one literal, and the other figurative, you ought not to determine the application of it, in any particular passage, to either of them without a reason. And since the creation of the heavens and the earth, whenever they are expressly mentioned, is constantly ascribed to God the Father; and the *figurative creation* only, where *that* is evidently intended, to Christ, we are certainly not authorized to ascribe to him any other creation than the latter, in any passage in which the expression is indefinite. If  
this



this be not a natural and just rule of interpretation, I am not acquainted with any that ought to be called such; and this clearly gives the creation of the world to the Father, and not to Christ.

After reciting those passages which you think prove that the apostles considered Christ as the maker of the world, but without any notice of the Socinian interpretations of them, you say, Note, p. 141, "It is a circumstance a little discouraging, in reciting this evidence from scripture, that some modern Socinians would not be convinced by it, were it ever so clear and decisive." Then, mentioning my name with a degree of respect to which I cannot think myself entitled, you say, "he intimates that had this been the opinion of the apostles, we should not be bound to receive it."

Now, unless you believe the plenary and universal inspiration of the apostles, which you will not pretend to do, I do not see why you should be at all staggered at this. Suppose any of the apostles had incidently spoken of the sun and stars revolving round the earth (which, if they had given any opinion on the subject, they probably would) should you have subscribed to it? You would have said, that such an opinion had no connexion with their proper commission. Shew then the *necessary connexion* (for of *imaginary* and *remote* connexions there is no end) between any thing  
in,

in, or belonging to, the commission of the apostles, *Go, and teach all nations, &c.* and the doctrine of the making of the world by Christ. It certainly was not *necessary* that he who came to *redeem* the world (whatever you mean by that term) should have *created* it also.

As I have observed before, you cannot say that Christ himself ever dropped the most distant hint of his having been the maker of the world. Nay, the contrary, as I have shewn, is implied in what he said. We ought therefore, to have very good and clear evidence, to think that the apostles meant not only to *advance* so much above what had been taught by their master, but really to teach a contrary doctrine.

Had I been living in the age of the apostles, and heard any of them advance such an opinion, I think I should have taken the liberty to ask their authority for it. The Jews, who looked to the prophets for the character and office of the Messiah, where they saw nothing of the kind, might well have said to any of them who should have taught such a doctrine as this, *Thou bringest strange things to our ears.* That such a remark does not appear to have been made, amounts, in my opinion, to a proof that no such doctrine was taught.

I am, &c.

## LETTER VI.

*Of the Argument for the pre-existent Dignity of  
Christ from his working Miracles.*

DEAR FRIEND,

I Shall now drop the consideration of Christ having been the creator of the world, and attend to what you have said of his *pre-existent dignity* in general. Among other proofs of this, you say, p. 125, "the history of our Saviour, as given in the "New Testament, and the events of his life and "ministry, answer best to the opinion of the superiority of his nature," and among other particulars, you enumerate "the wisdom which discovered itself in his doctrine, and by which he "spake as never man spake, that knowledge of "the hearts of men, by which he could speak to "their thoughts, as we do to one another's words, "and those miraculous powers by which, with a "command over nature like that which first produced it, he ordered tempests to cease, and gave "eyes to the blind, limbs to the maimed, reason "to the frantic, health to the sick, and life to the "dead."

These



These instances of wisdom and power would indeed be a proof of a nature superior to man, if in any proper sense, this wisdom and power could be said to be *his own*, or to belong to him, as the powers of walking and speaking belong to men in general, powers which we can exert whenever we please. But the reverse of this is most clearly asserted by our Lord himself, John xiv. 10. *The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doth the works.*

This is indeed fully acknowledged by yourself, in your *Sermon on the Resurrection of Lazarus*, where you say, p. 331, “the manner in which he “referred his miracles to the will and power of “God, requires our attention. After the stone “was taken away, he made, we are told, a solemn “address to God; and lifting up his eyes, said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. “This implies that his ability to work his miracles was the consequence of his having prayed “for it. Throughout his whole ministry, he was “careful to direct the regards of men to the deity, “as the fountain of all his powers. His language “was, *the Father who dwelleth in me, he doth the “works. I can of my own self do nothing. I came “to do the will of him that sent me.*” This is very ingenuous, but surely not very consistent with your inferring the super-human nature of Christ from his miracles, which, according to your own account,

count, might have been wrought by any man, equally aided by God.

The persons who saw the miracles of Christ, and who must have been as good judges in the case as we can pretend to be, never inferred from them that he was, *in himself*, of a nature superior to man, but only that *God was with him*, and acted by him, as he had done by Moses. Among others, Nicodemus says, John iii. 2. *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God. For no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.* After he had cured a person sick of the palsy at Capernaum, we read, Matt. ix. 8. *When the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, who had given such power unto men.* After the cure of the demoniac, on the descent of Christ from the mount of transfiguration, Luke ix. 43, it is said, *they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.* And after his raising the widow's son to life, it is said, Luke vii. 16. *And there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God had visited his people;* meaning, no doubt, as he had done the Israelites in Egypt, by sending Moses to them.

Besides, I do not see how your argument for the superior nature of Christ from his miracles is consistent with what you say, Note, p. 140, of the suspension of his powers. " That humiliation of  
" Christ,

“ Christ, and suspension of his powers, which is  
“ implied in his being made a man, and growing  
“ up from infancy to mature age, subject to all  
“ our wants and sorrows, is indeed, as to the man-  
“ ner of it, entirely incomprehensible to us.”

But perhaps your idea was, that his natural powers were suspended only from the time of his incarnation to that of his public ministry; when the full exercise of them was restored to him, so that he wrought his miracles with no more particular assistance than I have in writing this book. But such a temporary suspension and restoration of his powers is a mere arbitrary supposition, without any foundation in the history, or rather in contradiction to all those passages that imply the immediate agency of the Father in the miracles of Christ. There is also, in this case, a difficulty which I have mentioned before, and to which you do not seem to have given sufficient attention, viz. that in this interval of thirty years, the government of the world was in different hands, and yet without any change being, I presume, perceived in the conduct of it.

I am, &c.



## L E T T E R VII.

*Of the Argument for the pre-existent Dignity of Christ, from his being supposed to have raised himself from the Dead, and from his voluntarily dismissing his Spirit when he died.*

DEAR FRIEND,

“**A**NOTHER fact,” you say, p. 128, “of the same kind” (viz. which proves his nature to be superior to that of man) “is his raising himself from the dead. This he seems to have intimated, when he says to the Jews, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.* But more expressly in John x. 17, 18. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.* In all other places God is said to have raised Christ from the dead; and these words inform us how this is to be understood. God raised Christ from the dead by giving him a power to raise himself from the dead, and not only himself, but all the world.”

But

But can you suppose that, if every thing which exceeded the power of an ordinary man, that was *seemingly* done by Christ, was not *really* done by him, but by God who was with him, while he was *alive*, the case was not the same with every thing that respected him when he was *dead*? Or can you imagine that, if the apostles had *understood* him to mean what you do, in the expressions above quoted, they would not have made the greatest account of the circumstance, and have expressed it in the clearest terms *after his resurrection*, as a proof of his pre-existent dignity, and superior nature? But, as you acknowledge, “in all other places God is said to have raised Christ from the dead;” and though the resurrection of Christ is frequently mentioned by them, there does not occur a single expression, in all their preaching or writing, that, by any mode of construction, can be interpreted into an intimation, that they had the idea of his having raised himself from the dead. It is plain, therefore, that his disciples did not understand him to mean what you do in the expressions you have quoted.

Besides, the expressions which you have quoted, easily admit of another interpretation; whereas, in the numberless passages in which God is said to have raised Christ from the dead, the language is plain, so as to give no suspicion of one thing being said, and another thing being intended. And surely we ought to interpret what is less intelligible

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by what is more so, and not that which is more intelligible by that which is less so, which is the rule which you have followed.

But let us interpret the language that Christ used by itself. He says, *I have power to lay down my life*, and *I have power to take it again*. If therefore the latter power was voluntary, and exerted at his own pleasure, so was the former. But did Christ die, that is, expire on the cross, by any proper act of his own, and not as the natural consequence of his crucifixion? This is very far from any thing that is said, or that is intimated, by the historians; and if it had been the fact, would have reflected the greatest dishonour upon him, and must have had a very bad effect with respect to his example in suffering? as it would have been said, that he exerted a power to shorten his sufferings, of which his followers were not possessed. And the natural suspicion would have been, that by the same power by which he shortened his sufferings (putting a period to his own life, and thereby certainly authorizing suicide) he prevented the natural effect of scourging and crucifixion, so as to have felt no pain at all in the whole of the transaction. Far be such thoughts as these from those who profess to respect and honour Christ, as the *author of their faith*, and the pattern they propose to follow.

You



You seem, however, to have adopted this idea of Christ having voluntarily dismissed his spirit, strange as it appears to me, equally dishonourable to Christ, and unfriendly to the gospel. For you say, Note, p. 126, "After hanging on the cross a sufficient time, and crying with a loud voice, *it is finished*, he bowed his head, and dismissed his spirit (*παρέδωκε το πνευμα*). This was dying as no one ever died, and verified his declaration, that no one took his life from him, but that he gave it up of himself."

On this subject, which is of some importance, I wish to make a few observations.

1. Had it been the real opinion of the writers of the gospel history, that Christ voluntarily dismissed his own spirit, and did not die as other men do, by the exhausting of what may be called, the *vital powers*, they would *all of them*, have expressed themselves so clearly, as to have put the matter out of doubt. The thing was so new, and so extraordinary, that not one of them would have contented himself with describing the fact, in such language as could have led any one to conclude that he *might* have died as other men did. But both Mark and Luke, describing the death of Christ, simply say, *ἐξεπνευστε*, *he expired*, or *breathed his last*, though Matthew says, *αφῆκε το πνευμα*, and John, whom you quote, says, *παρέδωκε το πνευμα*.

2. Had you looked into Wettstein on Mat. xxvii. 49. you would have found four examples of natural deaths being described by heathen writers, in the same manner as the death of Christ is described by Matthew and John. Euripides uses the very same phrase with Matthew, ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα. In two of Ælian, and one of Herodotus, we have ἀφῆκε τὴν ψυχὴν. In the Septuagint, Gen. xxxv. 18. the death of Rachel is described in the same manner, ἐν τῷ ἀφιέναι αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν, literally *when she dismissed her soul*? How then can any stress be laid on this phraseology? How does it prove that no one died as Christ did?

3. I would farther observe, that if the connexion between the body and soul of Christ was of the same nature with that which subsists between the bodies and souls of other men (and as his pre-existent spirit is supposed to have supplied the place of a proper human soul, one would imagine that the connexion must have been of the same nature) its agency upon the body must, according to your idea, have ceased at death.

On the whole, therefore, we are abundantly authorized to interpret the very few expressions, on which you lay so much stress, agreeably to the plain and uniform tenor of scripture (according to which Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God his Father, and not by any power of

of

of his own) as only importing his voluntary acceptance of the part that he acted in life, with a view to the reward that he was to have for it, voluntarily submitting to be put to death, in order to be raised again. And I conclude, that what he said of *no man having power to take his life from him*, is best explained by his declaration, that he could have prayed to the Father, who would have sent him legions of angels to rescue him, and not by his manner of expiring on the cross.

Stress has been laid on the circumstance of Christ *crying with a loud voice* immediately before he expired, and on Pilate's wondering that he should have been so soon dead. But what Christ had previously suffered in his agony in the garden should be taken into consideration. Such distress of mind as he must have felt (probably through a great part of the night, which he passed without sleep) and which produced great *drops of sweat falling to the ground* (even though they should be supposed not to have been *drops of blood*) must have exhausted him very much. Such terror of mind as this has been known, of itself, to occasion death. No wonder then, that Christ was not able to carry his cross, and that he expired before the two thieves. As to the *loudness of his cry*, nothing is more common than great exertions of any kind before death, and they contribute to hasten death, by exhausting the vital powers.



When you shall have considered all these circumstances, I flatter myself that you will see sufficient reason to be satisfied that Christ did not accelerate his own death. To think that he died *naturally*, and as other men do, in and by torture, is infinitely more honourable to him, and more favourable to christianity, though less favourable to your peculiar opinion concerning the pre-existent dignity of his nature. And if the phrase, *power to take away his life*, does not mean a voluntary power of putting an end to it, the corresponding phrase, *power to take it again*, cannot be construed to imply a power of raising himself from the dead,

I am, &c.

LETTER

## L E T T E R    VIII.

*Of the Argument for the pre-existent Dignity of Christ from particular Passages of Scripture supposed to assert, or to imply it.*

DEAR FRIEND,

I Am rather surprized that you should lay any stress on Christ's praying for *the glory which he had with God before the world was*, p. 133, when this is so naturally interpreted of the glory that was *intended* him before the world was. This glory was evidently the reward of what he did *in the world*, and not of any thing that he did before he came into it. John xvii. 4. *I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O father, glorify thou me with thine ownself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

Besides, how unnatural must it be to suppose that Christ could have any occasion to pray for a degree of glory of which he was possessed before he came into the world, when the part that he had acted in it would naturally entitle him to something more. As we are assured he was *exalted*, so

no doubt, he knew the divine intention, and may be supposed to have had that exaltation in view in the *glory* for which he prayed.

If we must interpret the language of scripture in an absolutely literal manner, we must admit, as I have shewn in some of the former letters, not only that Christ *existed*, but also that he was *slain*, before the foundation of the world; and not only that *he* had glory, but also that *we* had glory with him before the world began.

You make it an argument for the pre-existent dignity of Christ, p. 136, that Paul says, 2 Cor. viii. 9. *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.* "When," you say, "did our Lord possess riches? When did he exchange riches for poverty, in order to make us rich? In this world, he was always poor and persecuted." But may not a man be said to be rich, who has the power of being so, or is supposed to have that power? Now, Martha says to Christ, John xi, 22. *I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee*; and he himself said, when he was apprehended, that he could have prayed to his Father, and that thereupon he would have sent him legions of angels to rescue him. Was not this to be *rich*, and *powerful*? And might not his declining  
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the actual possession of riches and power, which were within his reach, be called his *becoming poor*?

But you say, "In my opinion, the most decisive text of all is that in Phil. ii. 5. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who,*" as you properly translate it "*being in the form of God, did not covet to be honoured as God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

After reciting the Socinian interpretation of this passage, you add, p. 138, "It is natural to ask, here, when did Christ divest himself of the power of working miracles? The gospel history tells us that he retained it to the last, and that he was never more distinguished than when, at his crucifixion, the earth shook, the rocks were split, and the sun was darkened. Indeed, the turn and structure of this passage are such, that I find it impossible not to believe, that the humiliation of Christ, which St. Paul had in view, was not his

“ his exchanging one condition on earth for an-  
 “ other, but his exchanging the glory he had with  
 “ God before the world was, for the condition of  
 “ a man, and leaving that glory to encounter the  
 “ difficulties of human life, and to suffer and die  
 “ on the cross. This was in truth, an event  
 “ worthy to be held forth to the admiration of  
 “ christians.”

Indeed, had such an extraordinary event as this  
 really taken place, it certainly would have been  
 asserted with unequivocal clearness, have been fre-  
 quently repeated, and have been dwelt upon, as its  
 importance required. But because it is no where  
*clearly asserted*, and much less *dwelt upon* by the sa-  
 cred writers, I cannot persuade myself that any  
 such thing ever took place. For whatever you  
 may *infer* from this passage, the apostle neither  
 here, nor elsewhere, *plainly says* that Christ existed  
 before he was born in this world.

Whatever be meant by the phrase *the form of*  
*God*, whether the power of working miracles, or  
 any thing else, we are not told that he was pos-  
 sessed of it *before his birth*. To affirm that he  
 was, is not *interpreting* scripture, but *adding* to it.  
 And as the same exaltation of Christ, which you  
 make to be the reward of this *degradation*, is al-  
 ways said to have been the reward of his *suffering*  
*of death*; we are, in my opinion, abundantly au-  
 thorised to conclude, that these two circumstances,  
 which

which had the same consequences, were the same things, let the terms in which they are expressed be ever so different.

You ask, "When did Christ divest himself of 'the power of working miracles?'" I answer, that he ceased to exert this power (which, to all the purposes of the present question, is the same thing with divesting himself of it) when he voluntarily yielded himself up into the power of his enemies; though, as he assures us, he might have prayed to the Father, and he would have sent legions of angels to rescue him out of their hands. And however his death was distinguished by miracles, which God thought proper to work for that purpose, it does not appear that he himself was in the smallest degree instrumental in working them; and they did not save him from death, or alleviate his sufferings in the least.

Considering the amazing difference between the appearance of Jesus when stilling the waves of the sea, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead, and that of the same person in the hands of his enemies, and hanging on a cross; surely it is not too much to describe the former, by saying, that he was *in the form of God*, and the latter by saying he was *in the form of a slave*; crucifixion being the death to which slaves were usually put. I therefore see no reason to be dissatisfied.



satisfied with the interpretation which the Socinians usually put upon this celebrated text; nor do I think it to be in the least degree favourable to the Arian hypothesis.

I am, &c.

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### LETTER IX.

*Of the Argument for the superior Nature of Christ from his raising the Dead, and judging the World,*

DEAR FRIEND,

**I** Now come to the consideration of two circumstances, on which you have laid very great stress, as incontestably proving that Christ must have had powers superior to those of man, and consequently have been of a nature superior to that of man; I mean his being destined to *raise the dead*, and *judge the world* at the last day. On this subject you express yourself with peculiar energy, and an air of triumph.

“The scriptures,” you say, p. 146, “tell us  
“that Christ, after his resurrection, became Lord  
“of the dead and living, that he had all power  
“given him in heaven and in earth, that angels  
“were

“ were made subject to him, and that he is here-  
“ after to raise all the dead, to judge the world,  
“ and to finish the scheme of the divine moral  
“ government with respect to this earth, by con-  
“ ferring eternal happiness on all the virtuous, and  
“ punishing the wicked with everlasting destruc-  
“ tion.—Consider whether such an elevation of a  
“ *mere man* is credible, or even possible. Can it  
“ be believed that a mere man could be advanced  
“ at once so high, as to be above angels, and to  
“ be qualified to rule and judge this world? Does  
“ not this contradict all that we see, or can con-  
“ ceive, of the order of God’s works? Do not  
“ all beings rise gradually, one acquisition laying  
“ the foundation of another, and preparing for  
“ higher acquisitions? What would you think,  
“ were you told that a child just born, instead of  
“ growing like all other human creatures, had  
“ started at once to complete manhood, and the  
“ government of an empire. This is nothing to  
“ the fact I am considering. The power, in parti-  
“ cular, which the scriptures teach us that Christ  
“ possesses, of raising to life all who have died,  
“ and all who will die, is equivalent to the power  
“ of creating a world. How inconsistent is it to  
“ allow to him one of those powers, and at the  
“ same time to question whether he could have  
“ possessed the other?—to allow that he is to re-  
“ store and new create this world, and yet to deny  
“ that he might have been God’s agent in origi-  
“ nally forming it?”

I was

I was not willing to abridge any part of this fine passage, to shew that I am not afraid to meet the full force of your argument. I shall not, however, attempt to answer this piece of eloquence (for such it is) by a similar one. In that I should fail. But I shall take the liberty to *analyze* it, and interpret one scripture expression by another. Now, there are but two particulars of much consequence, in which the great power and prerogative of Christ are here said to consist; one is that of *raising the dead*, and the other that of *judging the world*.

As to the former, you will hardly say that Christ will *hereafter* raise the dead by any other power than that by which he raised them when he was *on earth*; and this, you have acknowledged, not to have been by any power properly *his own*, but that of his Father, who was in him, or acted by him. And in the same manner you cannot deny, but that he was in, or acted by, other mere men. For some of the old prophets raised the dead before Christ, as did the apostles after him. From this circumstance, therefore, we are not obliged to infer that Christ was of a nature superior to that of man.

Christ is also said to *judge the world*. But whatever knowledge may be requisite to his doing *this*, may be as easily imparted by God, as the power of raising the dead; though when you say that his qualifications for discharging this office were



were acquired *suddenly*, you overlook the long interval between his ascension and his second coming, in which you cannot suppose that he is doing and learning nothing.

However, if we interpret the scriptures by themselves, you must acknowledge that this office of judging the world, in whatever it consists, and in whatever manner it be discharged, is no more peculiar to Christ than that of raising the dead. Our Saviour himself says, Matt. xix. 28. *Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me in the regeneration, when the son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* And the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. vi. 2. *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world—Know ye not that we shall judge angels?* Whatever superiority to angels is ever said to be given to Christ, is here sufficiently intimated to be given to all christians. For the person *judging* is certainly superior to the person *judged*.

You may say, that we are to understand the term *judging* literally with respect to Christ, but figuratively with respect to his disciples. But this is quite arbitrary, and unauthorized. Judging the world, therefore, is no proof of a nature superior to that of man. Nay, so far is this business of *judging* from being considered as a proof of a *superior nature*, that our Saviour himself represents

presents it as peculiarly proper to him as *a man*. John v. 27. *And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the son of man.* Not so the Arian will say, but because he is the *son of God*, and was so before all worlds. But this is being *wise above what is written.*

In this manner it is easily shewn, that, whatever *glory*, or *power*, is attributed to Christ in the scriptures, the same *in kind*, if not *in degree*, is ascribed to all his disciples, and especially his apostles. Indeed, this is fully asserted in general, but very expressive terms, by our Saviour himself, in his last solemn prayer, in which he says, John xvii. 22. *And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one.* The apostle Paul also says, Rom. viii. 17. *And if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together.* From this it is impossible to collect any idea of difference, except in *precedence*, of Beings of the same rank. On this idea Christ is stiled *our elder brother*. But how could he be considered as our *brother*, if he was our maker? The difference would be far too great to admit of any such comparison.

Thus, I imagine, I have in some measure answered your demand, in the Note, p. 130, in which, after exhibiting what may be called *the low Socinian scheme*, "which alone," you say, "is tenable,"

“able,” you add, “The consequence of thus lowering Christ before his death, is the necessity of lowering him likewise since his death. And accordingly this able writer, whose candour appears to be such as will not suffer him to evade any fair inference from his opinions, has farther intimated, that Christ’s judging the world may mean less than is commonly believed, and perhaps the same that is meant, 1 Cor. vi. 2. where it is said that the *saints are to judge the world*. I hope that some time or other he will have the goodness to oblige the public by explaining himself on this subject; and when he does, I hope he will farther shew how much less than is commonly believed we are to understand by Christ’s *raising the world from the dead*.”

If by Christ’s raising men from the dead *hereafter*, you understand a raising them by a power different from that by which he raised them *here*, viz. a power that may, in any proper sense, be called *his own*, which you sometimes seem to apprehend, and which indeed your argument requires, my idea of it is very different from yours. But then I think you will not easily find any authority for your opinion in the scriptures.

There must always be great uncertainty in the interpretation of prophecies not yet fulfilled. We

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cannot



cannot, therefore, expect to understand what is meant by the phrase *judging the world by Christ*, or *by the saints*; but it is very possible that it may be something very different from what the literal meaning of the words would convey to us. Perhaps neither the saints, nor Christ, will then discover any greater discernment of characters than all men, even those who shall then be judged, will be possessed of; in consequence of which every person present may be satisfied, from his own inspection, as it were, that every character is justly discriminated, and the condition of all persons properly determined; all having the same intuitive knowledge of themselves, and of each other; all equally judging from the appearances which will then be presented to them. Indeed, a general conviction of the equity of the proceedings of that great day, seems to require this general knowledge.

You express much surprize at the Socinian interpretation of the scriptures, and I, in my turn, cannot help expressing some surprize, that the comparison of some prophetic phrases of scripture with the fulfilment of them, should not have led you to suspect that much less than the words literally intimate may be intended by what is said of the world being judged by Christ! I shall recall to your attention two prophecies, as they may be termed, of this kind.

When

When God appointed Jeremiah to be a prophet, he said, Jer. i. 10. *See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.* Do not these phrases, literally interpreted, imply that as much power was given to Jeremiah in this world, as is ever said to be given to Christ in the next? And yet we are satisfied, that all that was meant by them was, that by him God would signify his intentions concerning what *he* would do with respect to various nations in the neighbourhood of Judea, and that Jeremiah, personally considered, had no more power than any other man.

Our Lord said to Peter, Matt. xvi. 19. *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* To appearance, this was giving Peter more power than was given to Jeremiah. But if we consider what was actually done by Peter, and the other apostles (for the same power is elsewhere given to them all) we shall find that much less was intended by this phraseology, than the literal import of it might lead us to imagine.

Interpreters differ with respect to its meaning. But it is evident that, at the most, it could only mean the apostles being empowered

to signify the will of God, and to pronounce what *he* would do; as when Peter passed sentence upon Simon, Acts viii. 20. and upon Sapphira. For these are the greatest acts of power that we ever find to have been exercised by Peter, or any of the apostles. But this was no power of *their own*. Neither, therefore, are we authorized, from the language of scripture, to infer that Christ will hereafter exercise any more power than he did on earth, which was no more than any other man, aided as he was by God, might have exercised.

I am, &c.

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L E T T E R X.

*Of the Hypothesis which makes Christ to be a mere Man, naturally as fallible, and as peccable, as other Men.*

DEAR FRIEND,

YOU express much surprize at my supposing Christ to be naturally *peccable* and *fallible*. But the maxims on which this is advanced with respect to him, you must admit to be just, when applied to any other man appearing in the character



racter of a prophet; and, therefore, till it be proved that he is more than man, they must apply to him also. They are these, viz. that no man claiming a divine mission is to be considered as *inspired* farther than he himself professes to be so, than the object of his mission requires, and than he proves that he is by the working of miracles; and that, with regard to other things, not connected with the object of his mission, and which he does not assert to be parts of the revelation communicated to him, there is no ground to suppose him to have more knowledge than any other man, who is, in other respects, in the same circumstances.

The doctrine of *universal inspiration*, or that of any man being possessed of *all* knowledge, is manifestly extravagant, and would never have been supposed of Christ, any more than of Moses, if it had not been imagined that he was naturally superior to Moses, and therefore had means of knowledge which Moses had not. If you consider the object of the mission of Christ, you must, I should think, be sensible, that it did not require more natural power, physical or moral, than that of other men, and therefore nothing is gained by supposing him to have more. And much will be lost, if any marks of ignorance, or of infirmity, should be discovered in him. In that case, we shall load the defence of christianity with needless difficulties.

Again, if other prophets might be ignorant of many things relating to themselves, why might not Christ also? As to his understanding all preceding prophecies, we are no where told that he was inspired with that knowledge, and therefore he might apply them as his countrymen of that age generally did, and as we perceive that the apostles, who were likewise prophets, did afterwards. But this subject is pretty largely discussed in the *Theological Repository*, and I cannot help wishing that you had not only quoted the *sentiments* there advanced, which, at the first proposal, cannot but appear offensive, and alarming, but had also examined the *arguments* there alleged in defence of them.

You lay the greatest stress on the *immaculateness* of Christ's character, as an argument for his superior nature. But though you profess to be determined by the language of scripture, you produce no passage in which his *sinlessness* is expressed in stronger terms than that of other good men, before and after him. If his nature was so *immaculate*, as that no temptation could have any effect upon him, why was he exposed to temptation? This would then have been as absurd as for God himself to have been *tempted with evil*.

That Christ had all the natural weaknesses of human nature, both of body and mind, is evident from the whole of his history; and if so, it was impossible

impossible that he should have been *naturally impeccable*. In this case there would have been no merit in his resisting temptation; and his example is very improperly urged upon us, except in the same sense as that in which the example of God himself is proposed to us; whereas it is evident, that the sacred writers had very different ideas of the nature and use of these two examples.

Was it possible that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews should have had the idea that you have of the natural strength of Christ's mind, when he said of him, Heb. v. 7. *Who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.* What can be more evident from this description, than that the writer considered Christ to have been naturally as weak as other men, and that he felt himself to be so?

Was this *strong crying and tears*, in the view of approaching death, what might be expected from the creator and governor of the world? The history of the agony in the garden, though it does infinite honour to Christ as a *man*, is certainly an abundant confutation of any opinion concerning his *superior nature*, and pre-existent dignity.

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You likewise make the *miraculous conception* of Jesus as well as his immaculate nature, an argument for his pre-existent dignity. These two circumstances are indeed generally urged as proofs of each other. For my own part, I scruple not to say, that I consider them both as equally destitute of proper evidence; and, moreover, that neither of them would be of any advantage to the christian scheme, if they could be proved. With respect to the miraculous conception, I shall only observe here, as I have done elsewhere, that if the circumstance of having *no human father*, be an argument for a superior and immaculate nature in Christ, the same thing, with the addition of having *no human mother*, must be allowed to be as good an argument for a superior and immaculate nature in Adam. And yet he was a mere man, and naturally as liable to sin as any of his posterity.

You say, and very justly, of this absolute immaculateness of character, p. 128, "it is inconceivable that it should have belonged to a mere man," and this you well illustrate in the Note. But if you reflect that your *logos* is a *created*, and therefore an *imperfect* Being, you must allow that, strictly speaking, even *he* cannot be immaculate, any more than he can be omnipotent, or omniscient. It is the prerogative of God only, that  
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great Being, who *only is holy*, and *who charges his angels with folly*.

If absolute perfection of moral character be necessary to that of our *redeemer*, we must both of us go back to Athanasianism. But if that be impossible, why should we acquiesce in an imperfect angelic being, rather than in an imperfect man; especially as it may easily be conceived, that a man like ourselves, incident to the imperfections of other men, is, in several respects, better adapted to be an *example* to us, than any Being of a nature superior to ours.

You acknowledge that there is some advantage in that hypothesis which represents Christ as a man, who had not naturally any advantage over other men. "Some," you say (p. 152, Note) "have lowered him into a man, ignorant and "peccable, and no way distinguished from the "common men of his time, except by being "inspired. And this, I am sensible, by bringing him down more to our own level, makes "his example in some respects more an encouragement to us, and more fit to be proposed to "our imitation." Now, it is certain that the example of Christ, especially in his humiliation and sufferings, is frequently proposed to us. It cannot, therefore, be any disadvantage to a scheme that gives so important an exhortation its greatest force.

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That Socinus himself, and others who have been called after his name, should have held an opinion concerning Christ very different from that which I have adopted, is as easily accounted for, as that Dr. Clarke should have adopted an opinion concerning the *logos* much higher than that which you contend for. After Christ had, for several ages been generally considered as the supreme God, and the proper object of worship, it might be discovered that he was a created Being, and even a man, and yet it might be thought going too far, not to admit that this created Being, or this man, might be the appointed medium, through whom our prayers were to be presented to the almighty Father, especially as he is called a *mediator*, and an *high-priest*.

In the same manner, after admitting that Christ was a mere man, and not the object of any worship, it might be thought too degrading to him, not to suppose, that a man so distinguished by God as he was, and brought into the world in so extraordinary a manner, as he was believed to be, had not some *peculiar privileges* above those of other men, and other prophets, as those of his being naturally *infallible*, and *impeccable*. It is no wonder that it should be some time before even Socinians began to think that there was nothing in the christian scheme that required this *unique* of a man, and that they should have embarrassed their hypothesis, rather than pursue it to its proper consequences,



consequences, when they appeared so very alarming.

But now, finding this alarm to be founded on mere prejudice, and that the cause of it has no existence in reason, or the scripture, unitarians in general will, I doubt not, acquiesce in that opinion concerning Christ which makes their hypothesis truly uniform, consistent, and abundantly less exceptionable, viz. that which you hold out as an object of astonishment in the notes to your Sermons. In the *Theological Repository* this hypothesis is fairly proposed, and defended; and there I wish to see it dispassionately discussed.

I am, &c.

LETTER

## LETTER XI.

*Of the Design of Christ's Mission.*

DEAR FRIEND,

**I** Do not chuse to consider largely what you call the other part of the Socinian hypothesis, viz. that which relates to *the end of Christ's mission*, with respect to which you say, p. 86, that "he not only declared, but obtained, the availableness of repentance to pardon," having already advanced all that is in my power on this subject, in my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. I shall therefore content myself with making a very few observations.

1. If what you lay down above be true, if Christ came to obtain the availableness of repentance to pardon, is it not rather extraordinary, that this, which must have been the great and principal end of his coming, should not have been announced by any of the ancient prophets.

2. If this had been the great end of Christ's mission, would it not have been declared to be so by John the Baptist, by our Saviour himself, or at least by some of the apostles, and in such language as could not have been misunderstood?

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3. If such, indeed, was the true cause of Christ's incarnation, is it not extraordinary that it should not have been thought of by any of the christian Fathers, or heretics; and that the idea should never have been started till a late period, as I have shewn in *my History of the Corruptions of Christianity?*

4. The Divine Being is declared to be as merciful to repenting sinners in the Old Testament as in the New, and without reference to any future event.

5. Our Saviour, giving an account of the mission of the preceding prophets, and of his own, in their order, certainly represents the great object of their missions to be the same, Matt. xxi. 33. The preceding prophets are, indeed, compared to *servants*, and himself to the *son of the householder*; but they were all sent to receive for him the fruits of the vineyard.

6. As to the sufferings of Christ, not only is his patience in bearing them proposed as an example to us, but in the passage quoted in a former letter, christians are represented as both *suffering* and *reigning* with Christ.

Let us not then look for *mysteries* where no mystery is, and obscure the beautiful simplicity of the gospel; which represents the Divine Being as always



ways disposed to receive returning penitents, as having sent his Son, as well as other prophets, for the benevolent purpose of reclaiming the world from sin, and to promise eternal life and happiness to all that hearken to them.

I must likewise add a few observations on what seems to have been the source of your ideas of the necessity of Christ's incarnation, and the efficacy of his death. "The whole christian scheme," you say, p. 170, "is founded on the supposition of "a calamity in which our race had been involved, "and which has been generally termed *the fall of man*. At the same time," you say, "what the "true and full account of this event is, it is probably impossible for us to discover, or even to "understand, were it communicated to us. It "is recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, but "in a manner, so mixed with emblems, derived "perhaps from the ancient hieroglyphical manner "of writing, and consequently so veiled and obscure, that I think little more can be learned of "it, than that there was a transaction at the origin "of our race, and the commencement of this "world, which degraded us to our present state, "and subjected us to death, and all its concomitant evils."

On this subject I would observe that, if *the fall of man*, whatever it was, had been an event on which "the whole christian scheme was founded,"

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we might have expected a more exprefs declaration, from fufficient authority, that it was fo. But in none of the prophecies in which the Meffiah is announced, is there the leaft reference to this catastrophe, which you fuppose to have made his incarnation neceffary. Neither John the Baptift, nor our Saviour himfelf, ever faid any thing that could lead our thoughts to it. And notwithstanding the frequent mention that is made of *the love of God in the gift of his Son* by the apoftles, it is never faid to have been to undo any thing that had been done at the fall, fome paffages of Paul alone excepted, who calls Chrift the *laft Adam*, and makes ufe of terms which imply that death was introduced by Adam, as eternal life is the gift of God by Chrift. But you know that the writings of this apoftle abound with analogies and antitheses, on which no very ferialous ftrefs is to be laid.

Allowing, however, all the authority that you poffibly can to the obfervations of Paul, it is far from carrying you to the whole extent of your hypothesis. All mankind, the wicked as well as the righteous, are to rife again, and nothing is faid by him that can poffibly be construed to fignify that *the availablenefs of repentance to pardon* was ever loft, or that it was recovered by Chrift.

Befides, all that Paul himfelf could know about Adam, and the effects of his fin, he muft have  
learned

learned from the books of Moses, which are as open to us as they were to him. What Moses says on the subject, you acknowledge to be very obscure, and therefore it will not authorize implicit confidence in any particular interpretation.

“ There are some,” you say, Note, p. 73, “ who  
 “ give such interpretations of the account in the  
 “ third chapter of Genesis, and the subsequent  
 “ references to it in the sacred writings — as make  
 “ them no evidence of any such event (introduc-  
 “ tory of death) as is commonly understood by  
 “ the FALL. But these interpretations, and the  
 “ opinions grounded upon them, are so singular,  
 “ that I have not thought them worth particular  
 “ notice.”

The interpretations on which you pass this censure, are pretty generally known to be mine. They are advanced in the *Theological Repository*, with the evidence on which they are founded; and instead of this unqualified censure, it would have given myself, and many other persons, great satisfaction, if you had thought them worthy of a serious examination. The opinion that I have advanced concerning the history of the fall of man, cannot, I am confident, be refuted, but on principles which suppose the plenary inspiration of Moses, and that of all the writers of the Old and New Testament, with respect to every thing they wrote, whether they expressly say that they were inspired



or not ; a position at which I suspect your mind will revolt as much as mine does.

As Moses himself, who seems particularly careful to distinguish what God said to him, and what came from himself, does not say that he received the account that he has given us of the creation, and fall of man, *from God*, I think myself at liberty to consider it as the best that he could collect *from tradition*. In my opinion also, there are many marks of its being a very lame account. And, as I have observed, it is far from solving the difficulty it seems to have been intended to answer, viz. the introduction of death and calamity into the world. Among other things I have remarked, that the fact of the human race being originally formed male and female, and consequently their being intended to increase and multiply, is a proof that they were also originally intended to be mortal ; and that immortality is reserved for that state, in which *there shall be neither marrying, nor giving in marriage*, but where men shall be as the angels that are in heaven.

In the Note, p. 178, you consider *the devil* as the tempter of Adam in the form of a serpent. But this could not have been the idea of Moses ; according to whom, the sentence passed upon the serpent has no relation to any thing but to the animal so called. And would there be any justice in punishing the serpent, the mere passive instrument,

ment, and letting the proper agent in the business go free? Moses had no idea of any thing beyond the mere serpent, and I cannot allow any authority to the interpretation of the author of the apocryphal book of *Wisdom*.

That our Saviour alludes to the agency of the devil in the first introduction of sin into the world, is, I think, by no means probable. He says (John viii. 44) *the devil was a murderer from the beginning*. But this refers to the murder of Abel by Cain. And as to what John says (1 John iii. 8) *of the Son of God being manifested to destroy the works of the devil*, it may well be supposed to mean that he came to put an end to *sin, or moral evil*, which is referred to *the devil, or satan*, as its principle, as every other *evil is*. On this account Peter is called *Satan* (Matt. xvi. 23) when he suggested an unworthy proposal, and Judas is called *the devil* (John vi. 70.) on account of his bad designs.

As to *the old serpent, the devil, and Satan*, in Rev. xii. 9. xx. 2. on which you lay some stress, I really do not pretend to understand it. It is the language of prophecy perhaps not yet fulfilled. It must also be observed that, this same *old serpent*, is likewise called (Rev. xii. 9.) *the great dragon*, and this dragon is farther described as being *red*, and having *seven heads, and ten horns, with seven crowns upon his heads*. He has also a *tail*, by which *he drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them*

*them to the earth.* And, according to most interpreters, this red dragon, with seven heads, seven crowns, and ten horns, is not the *devil* (admitting the existence of so extraordinary a being) but represents some earthly potentate, the enemy of christianity. But whatever be the meaning of this prophecy, we are not to look into so mysterious a book as the Revelation, for a plain account of either the introduction of evil into the world, or the remedy of that evil. It seems to have been written for a very different purpose.

I am, &c.

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## L E T T E R XII.

### *The CONCLUSION.*

DEAR FRIEND,

I Have now troubled you with animadversions on every thing that I think most open to objection in your truly excellent *Sermons*, and especially in the *Notes*, in which you chiefly quote what has been advanced by myself, either in works that bear my name, or in the *Theological Repository*. Let the arguments I have there advanced, and to which you have not directly replied, answer for themselves. You justly observe, that I do not shrink from any consequences of

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what I have advanced. Indeed, if a *proposition* be true, so must every *corollary* fairly drawn from it; and I have not yet seen any reason to be afraid of *truth*.

Some of the opinions on which you have slightly descanted are, I believe, novel, and a step, as you may say, beyond what other Socinians have gone; and yourself, and others of my best friends, are a good deal staggered at them. But in a short time this alarm, which is already much abated, will be entirely gone off, and then I shall expect a calm discussion of what I have advanced; and that doctrine will, no doubt, be established which shall appear to be most agreeable to *reason*, and the true sense of *scripture*. May whatever will not stand this test, whether advanced by myself or others, soon fall to the ground; but let no sentiment, however alarming at the first proposal, be condemned unheard, and unexamined.

Many of our common friends express some surprise that you and I, connected as we are by friendship, and a variety of other common circumstances; equally, I hope, ardent, and equally unwearied, in the pursuit of truth; and having given perhaps equal attention to the subject of these *Letters*, should, notwithstanding, differ so much as we do with respect to it. Many persons who know this, and who have not the leisure, or the opportunity, to study this question, that we have, may  
be

be led to think, that it will be in vain for *them* to attempt to arrive at any certainty with respect to it; and, out of despair, abandon the examination. But neither you nor myself, shall think this inference a just one; since each of us may be under the influence of prejudices, unknown to ourselves, but sufficiently conspicuous to others. Nay, with a beam in our own eye, we may fancy that we can discover a mote in that of each other.

You will, I doubt not, be able to account to yourself for what you will think my obstinacy in defending principles which to you appear evidently contrary to reason and the scriptures, under the idea of their being important truths. And I also must have some method of satisfying myself how *you* may be as ingenuous, and as candid, as I, of course, think myself to be, and yet persist in opinions, which I cannot help considering as wrong, and of the erroneoufness of which there seems to be the most abundant evidence.

Speaking of the Socinian interpretations of scripture, you say, p. 135, "I must own to you, "that I am inclined to wonder that good men "can satisfy themselves with such explanations." However you candidly add, "But I correct myself. "I know that christians, amidst their differences of "opinion, are too apt to wonder at one another, "and to forget the allowances that ought to be "made for the darkness in which we are all in-

You are too much of a philosopher to think that there can be any *effect* without an adequate *cause*; and you know that *wonder* is nothing more than the state of mind into which our ignorance of the causes of events throw us. And therefore whenever we think we can account for any appearance, all wonder ceases.

You will, I know, excuse me, if I account to myself for your continuing an Arian, notwithstanding the evidence that has lately been produced in proof of the Socinian, or as a I chuse to call it, the *proper unitarian* hypothesis, in the same manner in which we account for many worthy and intelligent persons continuing catholics, or Calvinists. This we believe to be chiefly owing to their minds having been very early impressed with the fullest persuasion of the truth of their respective principles; to their dwelling long on the arguments in favour of them (by which they are much magnified in their view) and to their not giving sufficient attention to those on the other side.

They may have the candour to hear, or to read, arguments against their opinions. But their minds being previously indisposed towards them, such arguments find there nothing congenial to themselves, and are not detained long enough to make a due impression. It is like the passage of a ship through the sea, or that of an arrow through the air. No track is left behind. Whatever it be that  
has



has once recommended itself to us, and we entirely relish, we wish to see confirmed; and it is always with some degree of aversion that we hear any thing that tends to disturb what we think already well settled.

You have read, I doubt not, with as much care and attention as, from the previous state of your mind, could reasonably be expected, all that has been written by Dr. Lardner, by our common friend Mr. Lindsey, and by myself, in support of the unitarian hypothesis. But I presume, that you have often refreshed your mind, and recruited your former opinions, by the writings of Dr. Clarke, Bishop Butler, Mr. Pierce, Mr. Emlyn, and other Arians; and having been early conversant with them, they have made an impression like that which is sometimes made on marble before it is concentered into a solid form, and which nothing can afterwards efface.

On the other hand, I shall not be offended, if you should account for my roving from one opinion to another, by supposing that I have a temper of mind too hostile to every thing that is *established*; or if you should say, that I am more apt to be satisfied with any thing belonging to myself, than with my *opinions*, and that I am not likely to fix long in any scheme.

Certain it is, that, so far from having much fondness for the opinions that I received from my education, I have gone on changing, though always in one direction, from the time that I began to think for myself to the present day, and I will not pretend to say when my creed will be fixed.

But whether we be apt to keep our opinions a longer or a shorter time, they please us so long as we can call them *ours*; and in that state of mind it is natural to give more attention to arguments that make *for*, than to those that make *against* them.

As to *the scriptures*, the perusal of particular texts never fails to be accompanied with their usual long approved interpretation; and we ofteneft think of, and dwell upon, those which favour our opinions. And with respect to those which seem unfavourable to them, we have all got some method or other of disposing of them, so that they shall not stand in our way; and these modes of accommodation never fail to occur to the mind along with the texts themselves, and thereby effectually preclude the conviction they might otherwise bring along with them. And if we think that, upon the whole, the *scriptures* are favourable to our opinions, we are apt to consider ourselves justified in giving little attention to other considerations; which, if properly reflected upon, might serve to give us a better

a better insight into the real sense of scripture itself.

Thus the pious catholic having always been taught implicit confidence in the decisions of his church, and having always understood our Lord literally, when he said, *this is my body*, and *except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you*; it is in vain to object to him the natural impossibility of the doctrine of transubstantiation. That he leaves with God, whose word, he believes, assures him of the *fact*. In this, therefore, he thinks it his duty to acquiesce; and he even makes a merit of sacrificing his *reason* to his *faith*.

In like manner, you must permit me to say, that, having, in a very early period, adopted your present opinion concerning Christ, having always considered the *logos* in the introduction to the gospel of John (*which was in the beginning with God, and which was God*) to be descriptive of *Christ*; having always understood the phrases *creation by Christ*, and his being *before Abraham*, &c. not in a figurative, but a literal sense, you have satisfied yourself with paying but little regard to the natural improbability (though in my opinion approaching very nearly to an impossibility) of your hypothesis. And then with respect to the numerous passages in which Christ is spoken of as  
a man,



*a man, unable to do any thing of himself, which the Athanasians interpret of his human nature only, you are satisfied with referring them to his state of degradation, in which he was only in fashion, or external appearance, as a man.*

Being thus secure with respect to the argument from *scripture*, which we all consider as the great strong hold of our faith; though, I doubt not, you have read with care all that I have written to prove that the great body of primitive christians were unitarians, you will naturally think either that the proof is somewhere defective (though you may not be able to say *where*) or at most, that it can only furnish one uncertain light to the interpretation of scripture, which to you appears, in this case, to be so plain, that it needs no interpretation at all.

I have not, therefore, the least expectation that any thing that I have advanced in these *Letters* will be able to make much impression on your mind; except that you may, perhaps, be led to think, that you had not sufficient authority for concluding that Christ, by his super-human power, accelerated his own death. On this subject I am willing to hope that the evidence I have produced of your having mistaken the meaning of the evangelists is so clear, and unexceptionable, that you may not see much to object to it.

But this concession, which is the utmost that I dare flatter myself with the hope of, does not materially affect your general hypothesis. You will even probably still think, that Christ raised himself from the dead, and will have no doubt of his being a great pre-existent spirit, the maker of the world, from matter with which he was furnished by the Father; and that he condescended to become incarnate, for the purpose of making it consistent with the justice of God to receive penitent sinners into his favour.

On the other hand, I must acknowledge, that my persuasion of the simple humanity of Christ, and even that of his being a man, naturally as weak, as fallible, and as peccable, as other men, is so fixed, from my present ideas of the meaning of scripture, and a variety of other considerations, tending to prove that such *must* be the meaning of scripture; that I have no idea of the possibility of my being ever brought to entertain a contrary sentiment. Indeed, I do not think that the arguments in favour of Arianism can be better exhibited, and as I may say, concentrated, than they are in your Sermons. In all probability, therefore, you and I must wait for farther light till the arrival of *the great teacher death*, and the scenes that will follow it.

In the mean time, our difference of opinion on this subject will not, I am confident, make the least

least change in our friendship and affection. We are equally, I trust, lovers of truth, and lovers of virtue; and also equally lovers of Christ, and of his gospel, notwithstanding our very different ideas of his person, and the object of his mission; though you consider him as your *maker*, and I as the *son of Joseph and Mary*, and (exclusive of divine communications) as possessed of no natural advantages over his father Joseph, or any other man in a similar situation of life in Judea.

It is likewise an equal satisfaction to both of us, to think that, on which ever side the truth lies, it will finally prevail over prejudice and error; and that, though the error be the opinion that we are now contending for, we are ready to say *amen* to a prayer for the extermination of it.

With the greatest respect and affection,

I am, Dear Friend,

Your's, sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,

MARCH 1, 1787.



A  
L E T T E R  
TO THE  
REV. MR. PARKHURST.

אני מאמין באמונה שלימה שהבורא יתברך שמו  
הוא יחיד ואין יחידות כמודו בשום פנים והוא  
לברו אלהינו היה הוה ויהיה :

Fid. Jud. Art. 2.

Præceptum de idolatria quasi tanti ponderis est ac reliqua  
omnia Mandata.

Maimonides de Idolatria.

LETTER

REV. MR. PARKHURST.

THE FIRST NUMBER OF THE NEW

AND SECOND EDITION OF THE NEW

AND THIRD EDITION OF THE NEW

THE NEW EDITION OF THE NEW

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A  
L E T T E R

TO THE

REV. MR. PARKHURST.

REV. SIR,

WHEN the preceding parts of this pamphlet were nearly printed off, I received (obligingly sent me by yourself) a treatise of yours, entitled, *The Divinity and Pre-existence of Christ demonstrated from Scripture, in Answer to the first Section of Dr. Priestley's Introduction to his History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ, together with Strictures on some other Parts of that Work*, and I cannot pass, without notice, the production of so learned a writer.

You must excuse, me, however, if I say that, having heard some time ago of this publication of yours, I had, from your character, formed expectations, which I do not find answered by it. I had been led to imagine, that you would have criticized my *History itself*, as a learned ecclesiastical historian, and not have contented yourself with  
replying



replying to a single section of the Introduction to it, which only relates to a discussion in which little *new* can be advanced, viz. of *the doctrine of the scriptures* concerning the person of Christ. The proper object of my work is to ascertain what must have been the sense of the books of scripture from the sense in which they were actually understood by those for whose use they were composed; and to determine what must have been the sentiments of the apostles, by means of the opinions of those who received their instruction from them only.

This is a new, and certainly an important field of argumentation, open to the learned part of the christian world; and I had flattered myself, that Mr. Parkhurst had been prepared to enter it with me. But this you entirely decline, because you think, p. 147, "your time may be much better employed." On the contrary, I cannot help thinking that, in the present state of things, it would have been much better to go over this new ground, than to tread over again the old and beaten one.

In your strictures, however, on my work, you think you have proved that Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp, were believers in the divinity of Christ. But what you have urged on this subject appears to me to be of little consequence, and to have been sufficiently obviated by  
what

what I have advanced in my History; so that I see no occasion to trouble our readers with any thing more on the subject. Let them compare my observations with your reply. Indeed, I do not know what more to say to any person, who can seriously maintain, that the appellation of *God*, perpetually applied to Christ in the shorter epistles of Ignatius, is no interpolation; such as the example you have produced, p. 135, "I wish you all happiness in our God Jesus Christ." This, Sir, is neither apostolical language, nor, indeed, that of any writer whatever, in any age of the church.

With respect to the great object of my work, you grant almost all that I contend for, when you say, p. 9, "There is but too much reason to apprehend, what Dr. Priestley, in the course of his work, several times mentions with triumph, to wit, that the bulk of christians have, in all ages of the church, been inclined to the unitarian doctrine." And yet you say, p. 98, "Mr. Howes has justly observed, that the modern opinion concerning the humanity of Jesus through life, has not the least countenance in its favour from the tenets of any one of the ancient sectaries." This expresses more confidence on the subject than Mr. Howes himself has done, as you include Photinus among those who were not properly unitarians. How this very extraordinary position will be supported by

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Mr.

Mr. Howes, or yourself, time, I suppose, will shew. It must, however, be by another kind of ecclesiastical history than any that I am yet acquainted with.

As to the orthodox Fathers, whose writings I have made use of in tracing the rise and progress of the doctrine of the trinity, you treat them with a degree of indifference and contempt that really astonishes me. "With regard to the follies of  
 "the succeeding christian writers, whether Greek  
 "or Latin, who, *neglecting the Hebrew scriptures*,  
 "idolized the very imperfect and faulty version  
 "of the Septuagint, and yet frequently followed  
 "the *ignes fatui* of their own imaginations, and  
 "of the Platonic and other vain philosophy,—as  
 "to such follies as these, I have no great objection to their being treated with the severity  
 "they deserve, though I should not myself choose  
 "the office of executioner."

But if there be any truth in the *outline* only of my History, the doctrine of the trinity had no existence till it was started by these very platonizing Fathers, so that the *folly* you ascribe to them must reflect upon the doctrine itself. It appears from their own confession, that this doctrine gave the greatest offence to the great body of unlearned christians, who had not been taught with clearness any other doctrine concerning Christ, than that he was a man inspired by God. You your-  
 self



self produce a passage from Eusebius, p. 99, in which it is said, that "the divinity of Christ was "a doctrine reserved by the Holy Spirit for John, "as being more excellent;" and the earliest date of his gospel is the year 64. Consequently, before this time the christian church must have been unitarian.

If I have sufficiently proved the truth of these facts, and others connected with them, it must be in vain to pretend that the scriptures of the New Testament will admit of any other than an unitarian interpretation. And the evidence of the facts I refer to does not depend upon writings, the authenticity and purity of which are so questionable as those of the apostolical Fathers, but on the uniform concurrent testimony of all the christian writers, from the age of the apostles till long after the council of Nice; and their works have, in general, come down to us as perfect as any ancient writings whatever.

I have also shewn, much at large, that the unitarians were not considered as *heretics* till a late period. I said, that even the *Ebionites* are not directly called heretics by Irenæus. In one passage, however, from this writer, which you produce, p. 96, you think that it does appear, that he must have considered them in that light. But admitting this, it amounts to nothing of any consequence, as it is expressly asserted by Je-

rom, that the Ebionites, who lived in a state of separation from other christians, were considered as heretics *only* on account of their observance of the laws of Moses.

As you have not even attempted to answer my work itself, I have no occasion to examine any thing that you have advanced; but, having this opportunity of addressing a letter to you, I shall make a few observations on an article which you have laboured the most in your performance, viz. the proof, or *demonstration*, as you call it, of the doctrine of the trinity, from the plural form of the word which is used to denote *God* in the Hebrew language, viz. אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*, or as you write it, *aleim*.

“*Aleim*,” you say, p. 69, “regularly and precisely denotes *the denouncers of a conditional curse*, “and by this very important Hebrew name, the “ever blessed three represent themselves as *under the obligation of an oath* to perform certain conditions.” Taking this for granted, you say, p. 82, “The doctrine of a plurality in Jehovah “is taught in above two thousand places of the “Old; and I add, that this plurality is, by a number of passages in both Testaments, fixed to a “trinity.” You likewise find an intimation, p. 16, “of the doctrine of the blessed unity in trinity, and trinity in unity,” in the three men who appeared to Abraham.

Few

Few persons, I believe, except those who pretend to find the philosophical discoveries of the present age in the Hebrew words of the Old Testament, will be disposed to lay any stress on this argument, or demonstration, of yours. Basnage and others, as zealous trinitarians as yourself, have shewn the futility of it; and till what they have written be answered, I should be abundantly justified in taking no notice at all of it. I shall, however, as the opportunity may never occur again, make a few observations on this subject.

1. Admitting the plural form of the word signifying *God* to be a just foundation for believing that there is a plurality in the divine essence, it is only in one particular language, which can no more be proved to be of divine origin than any other language, and may not even have been the most ancient; so that it might be merely accidental, that this word, as well as several others in the same language, and many in all languages, had a plural, and not a singular form.

2. We are no where taught in the Old Testament, that this mysterious doctrine of *three divine denouncers of a conditional curse* (at the idea of which the mind recoils) is to be inferred from the form of the word *aleim*.

3. As the same word is used to signify the heathen gods, as well as the God of Israel, it



might be expected that all nations had an idea of a plurality in the essence of all their gods. This you in part allow, and endeavour to prove it in the case of *Hecate*, or *Diana*, p. 144; and you suppose, p. 156, that the Philistines, who applied this term to their God Dagon, "might be used to compound idols." But you ought to have extended this to *all* the heathen gods, as well as to *Hecate*. But really, Sir, I wonder you were not struck with horror at this indirect comparison of your holy blessed and glorious trinity to the three-fold form of a heathen goddess. You might as well have pitched upon the three-headed monster Cerberus for your purpose. What would you have said if I had said any thing that could have led the mind to such a comparison?

4. Can you make it appear that any of the ancient Jews understood the word *aleim*, as you do, or that they drew any such inference from it? This you seem to have taken for granted, and you add, p. 36, that "a very great majority of the Jews before our Saviour's coming had apostatized from the doctrine of the divine trinity." But where, Sir, do you find the records of this great apostacy? And where are we to look for the remonstrances on the subject, which would certainly have been made by those who did not apostatize? Of the apostacy of the Israelites from the worship of the true God to that of idols, we

6

have

have abundant evidence; but of this greater change in the sentiments of a great majority of the nation, we have no account at all.

Of those Jews who had apostatized from the doctrine of the trinity, you say, p. 36, "*they*" "could not possibly at the time he" [Christ] "appeared, have supposed that the Messiah would be the second person in the trinity." And as to the Jews who were after our Saviour's time, you do not pretend to find among them any trace of the doctrine of the trinity, or of the divinity of the Messiah. With respect to these you say, p. 33, "I must enter my solemn protest against being guided by them, as to the sense of the sacred books, or in any matter of religion whatever; because the blessed master whom I profess to follow, and to obey, has repeatedly called the predecessors and instructors of these modern Jews, *fools and blind*, i. e. as to religious knowledge, and has said of them, *they be blind leaders of the blind; and if the blind lead the blind, shall not both fall into the ditch?*"

But can you, Sir, imagine that, if our Saviour had found in the Jewish teachers so capital a departure from the doctrine concerning God, as this apostacy from the ancient Mosaic doctrine of the trinity must have been, he would not have distinctly pointed it out, and that he would not have warned the people against the false glosses of the

Scribes and Pharisees upon *this* article of the law, as he did on others of much less importance? He had one fine opportunity, you must acknowledge, of doing this, and of explaining the doctrine concerning the divine essence, when he was questioned about *the first commandment*, Mark xii. 28. But both the Scribe and himself, on that remarkable occasion, assert the absolute unity of the divine nature.

You do maintain, however, p. 119, that our Lord's own disciples were at least *sufficiently prepared* by his discourses to consider him as God, during their intercourse with him. But how does this appear, when after his crucifixion we find two of his disciples on their way to Emmaus, expressing their highest admiration of him in these words, Luke xxiv. 19. *Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in word and deed, before God and all the people.* Is this, the natural language of men who had ever considered Christ as properly God, or who were at all prepared so to do?

I shall not enter with you into a discussion of the meaning of *particular texts*; having, as I think, sufficiently explained all those on which you descant, in my other writings. But I cannot help noticing your very curious interpretation of Christ's saying, John v. 30, that *he could do nothing of himself.* "We see then," you say, p. 62, "in what sense only the Son of God, in this passage,"

"sage,



“ sage, disclaims any power of his own, and says, “ that *he can do nothing of himself*, viz. as acting “ distinctly from his Father, with whom he was “ united.” But would you, Sir, have put the same construction on any similar saying of Moses, or any other prophet? Besides, if in this sense only, Christ could do nothing of himself, in the same sense the Father also could do nothing of himself; since, on your hypothesis, he must always act in conjunction with the Son. But where do you find any assertion like this in the scriptures?

Indeed, Sir, unless you, or your friends, can make a better defence than you have yet done of the doctrine of the trinity, notwithstanding you say, Adv. p. 6. you consider me “ as by no means a “ formidable opponent on scriptural subjects,” the consequence of which you express so much dread, *ibid.* p. 7. viz. that “ the religion of this once “ christian land will be reduced to a level with “ Mahometanism, and even in some respects below it,” must follow. In this method of characterizing *unitarianism*, you think, no doubt, to bring an odium upon it. But the comparison is now too much hackneyed for that purpose; and you are mistaken if you think that I am ashamed to avow my agreement with the Mahometans, or any other part of the human race, in the doctrine of the *divine unity*, and to worship together with them, *the one God and Father of all, the maker of heaven and earth.*

You, Sir, as well as my other adversaries think, I presume, to derive some advantage to your cause, from depreciating my knowledge of the learned languages, which is so necessary in these theological discussions. Dr. Horsley will not allow me to know any thing of Greek. Mr. Badcock makes me ignorant even of Latin, and you say of me, Adv. p. 6. "he appears to have but a slender acquaintance with the original language of the Old Testament, and never to have read the Hebrew Bible with care and attention. If he had, it seems almost impossible that he should have fallen into such palpable errors as he has done." You even insinuate, p. 3. that I may not know "that ׀ is as truly a plural termination in Hebrew, as —s is in our language."

Whether I be ignorant of Hebrew, or not, your *proofs* of my ignorance are not a little curious. One of them is that, "in the section of my Introduction, which professedly relates to the scriptures in general, I have not produced a single Hebrew word." (Adv. p. 6.) which I might have done, and yet have known very little of the language. And as to the unpardonable mistake I have fallen into, it is no other than I dare say, Bishop Lowth would have fallen into as well as myself. For he would not probably have thought of inferring the doctrine of the trinity from the word *aleim*.

On

On this subject of the knowledge of Hebrew, I will say (and you may smile at me if you please) that, as I have said I would not exchange my knowledge of Greek for that of Dr. Horsley, so neither would I exchange my knowledge of Hebrew with even that of Mr. Parkhurst, unseen, and unexamined.

I have, in the course of my life, given very particular attention to the Hebrew language. I began the study of it when I was about fifteen, and remember that at about eighteen I read in the historical books of the Old Testament, from Hebrew into English at family prayers. I taught Hebrew to a friend now living, before I was eighteen. Before I was twenty, I had read the Hebrew Bible twice through, once with points, and once without points. I had, likewise, read other books in Hebrew besides the Bible, and had begun the study of other oriental languages. I was then pretty well acquainted with Syriac, and was able to read Arabic. After this, though my attention was drawn to other objects, I never wholly laid aside my application to Hebrew; and it has happened that, within less than six months of the last year, I read the Hebrew Bible quite through, chiefly in Kennicott's edition (led to it in some measure, by a present being made me of that noble work by a person unknown, and for which I take this opportunity of returning thanks) and this I did without considering it as any great addition to my



my other business. If after all this, I know so very little of Hebrew as you represent, there must be something very extraordinary in the case; and the story will yield but little encouragement to other persons to apply to it.

But really, Sir, the important question is not, whether Dr. Horsley or myself know more of Greek, or whether you or I know more of Hebrew, but which of us makes the best use of what we do know.

With real respect, though with great difference of opinion, I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,

MARCH 7, 1787.

